Arabic-speaking students' responses to children's literature about the Middle East

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Abstract

This dissertation explores a group of first and second grade (rising second and third grade) Arabic-speaking students’ responses to literature about the Middle East in an elementary public school in the northeast of the United States. It examines the students’ engagement throughout multiple contexts (grade-level classroom, English as a New Language classroom, and culturally sustaining context) across 14 months. The study’s theoretical framework included transactional theories of response (Rosenblatt, 1978), culturally sustaining pedagogy (Paris, 2012), and translanguaging (García, 2009). Through the methodology of practitioner research (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009), I adopted a critical inquiry stance through being close to my participants, reflecting on practices, and analyzing engagement. Data sources included audio transcriptions, field notes from participant observations, interviews and students’ artifacts.

The findings of this study revealed how culturally sustaining literature and read-alouds can influence the students’ literary engagement. The Arabic-speaking students shared differently across multiple contexts. In the grade-level and English as a New Language classroom contexts, students listened, smiled, repeated some words to themselves, and silently dramatized their responses. In the culturally sustaining context I facilitated, students shared more detailed and elaborated responses. During the read-alouds, they became active responders to literature as they actively shared their dramatizations, questions, and predictions, using their comfortable language(s). Their engagement in the culturally sustaining context reveals that students do not only need to see themselves in books, but also a freedom space where they can be more fully themselves. The culturally sustaining context supported the focal students’ identity, cultural and linguistic pluralism, and critical consciousness (Zoch, 2017). The findings of this research study call for concrete reforms in education and social environments where students can bring the full
range of their linguistic and cultural resources to bear on their learning. The findings serve to extend the call for the need to rethink practice and reconsider the role of schools in establishing a democratic community.
Dedication

To Mai, Yan, and Ziad

You have great stories to tell – keep sharing!
Acknowledgements

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# Table of Contents

Abstract .......................................................................................................................................... ii
Dedication ..................................................................................................................................... iv
Acknowledgements ....................................................................................................................... v
Table of Contents ......................................................................................................................... vi
List of Tables ............................................................................................................................... iix
List of Figures ................................................................................................................................ x
Chapter 1 ....................................................................................................................................... 1
Introduction and Problem in the Field ....................................................................................... 1
Empirical Studies of Arabic-Speaking Students’ Academic Experiences ................................. 2
Research Questions ..................................................................................................................... 5
My Read-Aloud Philosophy in the Culturally Sustaining Context ........................................... 6

  *Literature About the Middle East Selections* ................................................................. 8

  What is the Middle East? .................................................................................................. 9
The Researcher’s Background .............................................................................................. 10
Theoretical Framework ........................................................................................................... 11
Transactional Theories of Response ......................................................................................... 11
Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy ............................................................................................... 13
Translanguaging ....................................................................................................................... 16
Organization of the Dissertation ......................................................................................... 17

Chapter 2 ..................................................................................................................................... 19
Relevant Literature .................................................................................................................... 19
Literature as a Mirror ................................................................................................................ 19
Interactive Read-Aloud ............................................................................................................ 21

  *Read-Aloud and Bilingualism* ......................................................................................... 24

  *Read-Aloud and Critical Conversation* ......................................................................... 24
Whole Classroom Discussion of Literature ............................................................................. 26
Small-Group Literature Discussion ...................................................................................... 30
Modes of Response to Literature ......................................................................................... 31
Connecting with Families ..................................................................................................... 34

Chapter 3 ..................................................................................................................................... 37
Methodology .............................................................................................................................. 37
Practitioner Research .............................................................................................................. 37
## Methods of Data Collection

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Method</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School Context</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade-Level Context</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ENL Context</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Culturally Sustaining Context I’m Teaching</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Data Collected</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participants</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phases of Data Collection</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Types of Data Collected</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observational Field Notes</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviews</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Read-Alouds</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multimodal Response to Literature</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transcriptions</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data Analysis</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Coding for Themes and Patterns</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Researcher’s Role(s)</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Validity and Trustworthiness</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## Chapter 4

### The Read-Aloud in Classrooms (Grade-Level and ENL)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Literature Can Influence Students’ Identity</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student-Teacher Discussions Around Cultural Issues</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students Share Their Experiences During Ramadan</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students’ Analysis of Illustrations</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Silent Dramatization</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talk to Self</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students as Resources</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students as Translators</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Read-Aloud for Building Cultural Understanding</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Read-Aloud for Building Cultural Understanding</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## Chapter 5

### The Read-Aloud in the Culturally Sustaining Context

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Read-Aloud to Support Students’ Identity</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Active Dramatization</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voice Acting</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical Consciousness</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Questioning the Text</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Section</td>
<td>Page</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Questioning the Characters in Texts</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exploring Each Other</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural and Linguistic Pluralism</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Translanguaging</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Read-Aloud to Support Students’ Enjoyment</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Chapter 6</strong></td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portraits of Students’ Engagement with Children’s Literature about the Middle East Across Multiple Contexts</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mai: Knower and Cultural Informant</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yan: When Disconnections Become Connections</td>
<td>105</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alternative Viewpoints and Suggestions</td>
<td>109</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ziad: Questioning the World</td>
<td>110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Chapter 7</strong></td>
<td>117</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussions and Implications</td>
<td>117</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Culturally Sustaining Read-Aloud as a Way for Humanizing Pedagogy</td>
<td>119</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Freedom Space</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implications for Theory</td>
<td>123</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implications for Research</td>
<td>124</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implications for Practice</td>
<td>125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limitations</td>
<td>132</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Significance of the Study</td>
<td>132</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>133</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>References</td>
<td>135</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children’s Literature Cited</td>
<td>152</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix A: Annotated Bibliography of Selected Picturebooks</td>
<td>154</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix B: Teacher Consent</td>
<td>160</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix C: Principal Consent</td>
<td>165</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix D: Parent Consent</td>
<td>168</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix E: Child Assent</td>
<td>173</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix F: Alignment of Data Sources with Research Questions</td>
<td>174</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix G: Interview Questions</td>
<td>175</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix I: Digital Coding Example</td>
<td>178</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
List of Tables

Table 1 Research Settings, My Role, and Methods ................................................................. 42
Table 2 Focal Students and Teachers .................................................................................... 42
Table 3 Focal Students ........................................................................................................... 44
Table 4 Phases of Data Collection ....................................................................................... 46
Table 5 Children’s Literature About the Middle East Used for Grade-Level Classroom, ENL Classroom, and Culturally Sustaining Context Read-Alouds ........................................... 50
List of Figures

Figure 1 The Three Distinct Contexts ................................................................. 6
Figure 2 Read-Aloud Discussion in the Culturally Sustaining Context ........... 81
Figure 3 Yan' Drawing "Nasreen Secret School" ............................................... 110
Figure 4 Freedom Space .................................................................................... 122
Chapter 1

Introduction and Problem in the Field

In this research study, I explored what it means for Arabic-speaking students to read literature that mirrors their cultural backgrounds and experiences. Literature continues to play an influential role in inviting various students’ backgrounds. Researchers argue that Arab-American students do not have the opportunity to see themselves and their cultural backgrounds reflected in books they read in schools (Al-Hazza & Lucking, 2007). Most of them tend to be silent about their traditions (Isik-Ercan, 2015). Thus, there is a need for more empirical studies on diverse children’s responses to literature about the Middle East. There seem to be many assertions related to the need for more culturally authentic books and how to find them, but less empirical research in this area. Research exists that investigates African American and mainstream students’ responses to diverse children’s literature (Buck, 2009; McNair, 2013; Möller, 2012). However, the field lacks studies investigating Arabic-speaking students’ engagement with literature about the Middle East in the United States context.

As politics impacts education, I have found that conducting my research study, especially at this particular time, put some constraints on how I conducted my research. It is a challenging time for immigrants, especially those who come from the Middle East since the media portrayals of the Middle East have not helped promote positive attitudes. Some people may feel topics such as these, reflecting the world of Islam, are controversial, especially when reading them in the mainstream classroom. Granting permission for this study required approval from district administration, the school principal, parents, and teachers. While some of them appreciated knowing about the world, others did not.
Therefore, we need to think of how we could support Middle Eastern students feel included. We cannot rely on what we see in the media; we should try to learn about in-depth cultural perspectives.

**Empirical Studies of Arabic-Speaking Students’ Academic Experiences**

According to Paris (2015), 2014 was recognized as the year where students of color were the majority in the United States public schools. As there is a noticeable increase in the number of Arabic-speaking students in the United States public schools, educators should consider innovative ways to promote students’ linguistic and cultural experiences within schools. Although the public perception of Arabic-speaking students is that of low performing learners (McBrien, 2005), there are few empirical studies that explore the students’ academic and literacy experiences in the United States public schools (e.g., Nykiel-Herbert, 2010; Sarroub, 2007; Walker-Dalhouse & Dalhouse, 2009). Through a study that connects culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy with immigrant newcomer Iraqi students’ engagement and literacy acquisition, Nykiel-Herbert (2010) suggests that engagement is an intrinsic key in academic development. Nykiel-Herbert studied 12 elementary students in grades three through five in an urban school in the United States. According to her, the students were identified as being at-risk of academic failure because of the lack of English literacy skills. Despite receiving English as a New Language (ENL) support on a pull-out basis, she argued, “the vast academic gaps could not be closed by [ENL] instruction only; the students also needed an injection of meaningful content, suited to their level of comprehension” (p. 5). The Iraqi students’ content in their grade-level classes was below their developmental level and culturally inappropriate (Nykiel-Herbert, 2010). Through a ten-month long culturally relevant intervention program that intended to support Iraqi students’ language and literacy skills as an alternative to sending them to special education, the
students had the opportunity to “advance academically, strengthen their sense of ethnic and cultural identity, and gain appreciation and respect for the host culture” (p. 13). Because of this intervention, the students performed well in the English literacy test.

Instructional practices play an important role in promoting students’ literacy development. Walker-Dalhouse and Dalhouse (2009) investigated Sudanese youth students’ adjustment to schooling and their literacy achievement by interviewing the students, their parents, and their ENL teachers. The authors contended that adaptation to a new life after resettling from their native country impacts the students’ academic performance at schools. The Sudanese parents value their cultural roots and believe that it is their responsibility to share their traditions with their children (Walker-Dalhouse & Dalhouse, 2009). Unfortunately, some teachers “immediately assume that Sudanese children are learning disabled when they are trying to adjust to American schools” (p. 332). Walker-Dalhouse and Dalhouse invite teachers to tap into their Arabic-speaking students’ prior knowledge when assigning reading materials.

The research investigates how secondary Arabic-speaking immigrants and refugees navigate their identities in and out of schools and how they strive to find a balance between their ethnic communities and their school identities (Sarroub, 2007; 2009). Such research argues that while schools are becoming more linguistically, ethnically, and religiously diverse, there is a need to consider the power of intertextuality in students’ lives (Sarroub, 2007). Sarroub (2007) defines intertextuality as “linking ideas, people and events, and making social, cultural, political, and historical connections” (p. 378). Through an ethnographic analysis of a study that focused on one English Language Learner Iraqi refugee boy, Sarroub (2007) examined his literacy experiences within multiple contexts. She found that the boy did not have an opportunity to voice
his thoughts within the curriculum. Therefore, she argues there is a need to support students’ literacies by helping them make connections with experiences they practice in their communities.

Religion can influence students’ cultural identities in schooling (Isik-Ercan, 2015). Through a qualitative study, Isik-Ercan (2015) investigated how 15 Turkish-American students negotiate their Muslim identity in elementary and middle schools in the U.S. Drawing from Bakhtin, the author focused on the participants’ responses on how they construct their identities in school. She found that some parents and students were happy to mention that Islam was one of the topics discussed in social studies classrooms, while others pointed out that Islam is invisible in the curriculum. Thus, some students felt that their teachers did not support their religious identity especially in schools that were not “open to multicultural perspectives” (p. 237). Isik-Ercan (2015) discusses that some students negotiated their identities and being “the other.” For example, one boy in this study did not want his mother, who wears a headscarf (hijab), to come to his school to avoid being different. When these students were asked about their religion at school, they tend to stay silent. Thus, they did not “talk about their religion at school unless directly asked” (p. 242). The author concludes that educators should consider diversity and social justice to support students’ educational needs and lives.

As Souto-Manning and Mitchell (2010) contend, students who experience “cultural discontinuity between home and school may perceive themselves as poor learners and may develop a negative self-concept” (p. 270). Therefore, the school should be an extension of life (Dewey, 2001), and learning should be relevant to the learners’ background cultures (Clay, 1998). In my dissertation study, I explore second and third-grade Arabic-speaking students’ engagement with children’s literature about the Middle East within multiple contexts and how
such literature can bridge the gap between curriculum and the students’ lives and, in turn, help them feel included in the school environment.

**Research Questions**

The purpose of this study was to research Arabic-speaking students’ responses when they engage in discussions about literature that mirrors their lives. I intended to explore how such literature can generate a “lived through” (Rosenblatt, 1978, 1995) experience in students. To examine the nature of this experience, I explored a group of first and second grade (rising second and third grade) Arabic-speaking students’ responses to literature about the Middle East in an elementary public school in the northeast of the United States. I studied what the students chose to share when they were in a small or bilingual group where all members are from Arab countries, and when they were in their classrooms and reading literature about the Middle East with their teachers. I looked for the teachers’ thoughts regarding the inclusion of literature about the Middle East and how it might promote Arabic-speaking students’ lives within classrooms. I also explored the Arabic-speaking students’ families’ perspectives around reading books reflecting their cultures with their children. Although the teachers’ and families’ perspectives were not the study’s focus, exploring such perspectives illuminated some interesting insights and added to the breadth of the study. I looked across three distinct contexts: grade-level classroom, ENL classroom, and culturally sustaining context. This study explored the following research questions:

1. What is the nature of Arabic-speaking students’ engagement with children’s literature about the Middle East in the grade-level and ENL classrooms?
2. How do Arabic-speaking students respond when I read children’s literature about the Middle East in a culturally sustaining context?
While the first research question explores the Arabic-speaking students’ engagement when their teachers read literature about the Middle East in the grade level and ENL classrooms, the second question illustrates the students’ engagement when I read such literature in a small group which I referred to as a culturally sustaining context. Figure 1 illustrates the three distinct contexts. Both the grade-level and ENL classrooms were similar because the focal students engaged in read-aloud with their teachers and classmates who were not from the Middle East. The culturally sustaining context, however, was a space where they could engage with people who share similar cultural and linguistic backgrounds.

Figure 1

*The Three Distinct Contexts*

My Read-Aloud Philosophy in the Culturally Sustaining Context

It is significant to establish a democratic environment that listens to all voices. My read-aloud philosophy was based on responsive interaction with the focal students. I listened to them and centered their ideas and curiosities. As Ballenger states, “democratic classrooms are ones where everyone’s ideas count and where every child feels that” (Muccio, 2012, p. 2). I believe that an experience that is not connected to students’ lives is worth less than the one that connects
and builds. Therefore, my read-aloud discussion was based on active and social interaction and interaction with the world—i.e., experiences—where students could interact freely with each other, their teacher, themselves, books, and the world.

While schools should reflect society and connect to home, I also believe my students should find themselves in books to continue to learn and build on their own prior experiences. I am increasingly concerned about how educators support social justice and democracy by humanizing education and empowering individuals. I believe all students need to have the opportunity to evaluate, create, interrogate, and construct their own knowledge. They need to engage in a democratic space that reflects their interests, needs, and sociocultural backgrounds. Thus, my teaching philosophy focuses on putting the learners at the front and center. Undoubtedly, students enjoy being in classrooms that are based on social interaction. Social learning is connected to the reciprocal teaching method, which is a model that helps students pull strategies together rather than learning via isolated skills. Thus, I aim to support students by establishing a classroom based on reciprocal relations. My classroom atmosphere is based on “a lively give-and-take of ideas experiences, [and] information” (Dewey, 1933, p. 264) between all members. Each member needs to feel that he/she has an integral part of the classroom community. Both students and teachers develop their critical consciousness through questioning and problematizing their reality and what has been understood as truth. Therefore, to have a deep critical awareness, I focused on making learning more responsive and relevant. I believe teachers must teach from a deeply held and felt philosophy, one which is always in the making, just as they are always in the making.

Throughout this study, the focal students were offered options to speak and write in Arabic or/and English. The focal students were regarded as knowers, informants, researchers,
and learners (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009). Thus, it is significant to establish a critical collaboration between the focal students and acknowledge what is known by working with them and understanding their experiences and what they already know (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009).

**Literature About the Middle East Selections**

Before sharing books with the students, I developed a textual analysis that critically analyzed how the Middle Eastern culture is depicted in children’s literature (more details about it in the Researcher’s Background section). For this analysis, I looked across multiple picturebooks and coded similarities and differences. I classified them in a way that is similar to Monobe and Son (2014). Thus, I built a chart that consists of the title of the book, author and the year of publication, illustrator, setting, type of conflict, how the character/s handle conflict, and elements in text or/and illustration related to the Middle East, Islamic, or Arabic world. Through this chart, I discovered common threads and themes across the books.

As a reflective practitioner, I actively look for recent texts that reflect the Middle East. I usually search for award lists for literature reflecting the Middle East, such as the Middle East Book Awards. I regularly consult Salaam Read, which was created by Simon & Schuster in 2016. Salaam Read is an imprint that is dedicated to publishing literature that mirrors the Muslim world such as, *Mommy's Khimar* (Thompkins-Bigelow, 2018) and *Salam Alaikum. A Message of Peace* (Harris J, 2017). I also choose books written by cultural insiders or those who have spent considerable time in the Middle East. Therefore, I often search for the authors’ background before reading reviews of the books. Sometimes, I consult Al-Hazza and Bucher’s (2008) criteria sheet that provides guidelines (language, illustrations, stereotypes, and characterization) for evaluating literature about the Middle East.
Literature that perpetuates the Muslim world frequently opens connections and disconnections to the Arabic-speaking students’ real-life experiences. Books that reflect Ramadan, hijab, mosque, and Arabic language can help in creating authentic discussions; for example, *Night of the Moon* (Khan, 2008), *Golden Domes, Silver Lanterns* (Khan, 2012), and *Silent Music* (Rumford, 2008). Significantly, I prefer to be responsive to my students’ responses to the literature as I consider their interests and queries in my literature selections. It is important to see ourselves reflected in books and engage in discussion in a responsive environment.

**What is the Middle East?** The Middle East encompasses twenty-two countries “situated on the African continent, north to Turkey across to Iran then south to encompass the entire Arabian Peninsula with Yemen at its southernmost eastern edge” (Al-Hazza & Bucher, 2008, p. 7). It includes the North African Arab countries (Al-Hazza & Bucher, 2008) such as Egypt, Sudan, Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, and Libya, and the northern part of the Arabian Peninsula including, Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, and Iraq. The regions of Pakistan and Bangladesh are included in some maps as belonging to the Middle East (Raina, 2009).

Some Westerners may think that all Middle Eastern countries are the same and may use one defining characteristic to identify this region and all people in this region (Al-Hazza & Bucher, 2008). For example, they may assume all Middle Eastern people are Arabs, and all Arabs are Muslims (Al-Hazza & Bucher, 2008). However, people in this region do not fall under one homogeneous culture nor religion, nor language. Thus, there are Arabs, Turks, Kurds, Israelis, Afghans, Iranians, and Pakistani. There are a variety of cultures, even within one country. Although the majority of Arabs are Muslims, there are more Muslims in Asia than in the Middle East (Wingfield, 2006). According to Wingfield (2006), “most of the largest Muslim countries are not Arab—Indonesia, India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Iran, Turkey, and Nigeria” (p. 7).
The Middle East has diverse religious groups of Christians, Jews, Druze, Maronites, and Zoroastrians (Al-Hazza & Bucher, 2008). It has a variety of languages such as Hebrew, Kurdish, Persian, Dari, and Arabic.

The Researcher’s Background

Since the researcher’s background influences the research, qualitative researchers need to reflect on themselves and how they came to their research study. Growing up in Saudi Arabia, I did not have the opportunity, as a child, to read literature that represents my own culture. I always realized I looked different than the people in books, I had different experiences, houses, and ways of living than the characters I saw in books. As an adult who only later in my academic life felt the power of “living through” (Rosenblatt, 1978, 1995) the literature of my own culture, I was fascinated by how such literature could inform my thinking, identity, and understanding.

My experiences throughout my doctoral studies created an opportunity for me to critically examine and reflect upon life through stepping outside the box and generating a conscious awareness of things I had taken for granted. My professional experiences as a graduate student at the University at Albany have influenced me and led me to this study. In the Theory and Research in Teaching Literature course, I developed a textual analysis that critically analyzed how Middle Eastern culture was depicted in children’s literature. Thus, I selected multiple children’s picture books written by Western authors to illuminate how they represented Middle Eastern societies. This Textual analysis project supported my critical stance and my growth as a researcher. It awakened my curiosity to know about Middle Eastern students’ engagement when they read such books that reflect their lives. Therefore, in my qualitative research courses, I piloted two different research studies, a practitioner research study and a case study, where I worked with a group of third and fourth-grade students, respectively, to explore
how they responded to picture books that reflected their world. Through piloting these studies, I worked with students across multiple contexts: home, school, and community center. My experience of observing, transcribing, analyzing, and navigating my identities influenced me as I conducted this study.

As a teaching assistant in masters-level practicum courses, I engaged in coaching graduate-student teachers as they tutored elementary children. During one-on-one responsive reading and writing practices, I observed, jotted notes, and then offered reflective feedback to the teachers through “noticing and naming” (Johnston, 2004) their instructional practices and the children’s engagement. This experience highlighted the power of developing collaborative learning communities among teachers, teacher educators, families, and students. It informed my critical lens as I analyzed and reflected on both teaching and learning. Thus, I have become more purposeful and reflective of how I envision schooling.

**Theoretical Framework**

In this section, I discuss the theoretical framework that guided me as I designed this study. As there is no single theory that can explain the nature of Arabic-speaking students’ engagement with children’s literature about the Middle East, I considered numerous theories as I investigated my research questions. The components of my theoretical framework presented below are the transactional theory of response, culturally sustaining pedagogy, and translanguaging. These components shaped my research questions, data collection, data analysis, and data interpretations. They helped me make sense of my role as a researcher and educator.

**Transactional Theories of Response**

According to Rosenblatt (1978), reading is a transaction where both the text and the reader interact and come up with something new. Thus, the reader is actively taking from and
bringing meaning to the text. Rosenblatt’s idea of the transaction was informed by John Dewey and Arthur F. Bentley, from the idea of interaction. Rosenblatt (1982) thinks that in order to have an effective literary understanding, children have to experience both efferent and aesthetic reading; while reading for meaning, children need to have a sense of pleasure, leading them to feel, connect, argue and respond to texts. When readers read aesthetically, their attention is centered on the “lived through” as they are experiencing the text. Therefore, they could “savor the images, the sounds, the smells, the actions, the associations, and the feelings the words point to” (Rosenblatt, 1991, p. 447). Rosenblatt (1985) contends that aesthetic response is the “starting point for criticism” (p. 103). Aesthetic reading not only reflects the enjoyment, but also the “reader may approve or disapprove of the characters’ behaviors or attitudes, moral codes, and social situations in the story” (Cai, 2008, p. 215). Building on Rosenblatt’s work, Brooks and Browne (2012) discuss the culturally situated reader-response model, which underlines that there are multiple positions, such as “ethnic group, community, family, and peer” (p. 78), that interact and impact readers’ responses to cultural issues. Thus, when students respond to texts, they try to make connections based on issues that already exist in their milieus, for instance, movies, games, and social practices (Brooks & Browne, 2012).

Drawing on Rosenblatt’s transactional theories, Sumara (1996) describes how reading is an ever-evolving, holistic, and interpretive practice. To him, “all texts are read in relation to the contexts of reading. And so, understanding the act of reading cannot be accomplished without an inquiry into the relations among forms, readers, and overlapping contexts of readings” (p. 1). Sumara uses the metaphor of travelers or tourists’ gaze to explain the kinds of literary engagements within texts: “dwelling” or “touring.” Although a traveler may enjoy a visit to new places, he or she may not come to “a deeper understating of what it might be like to actually live
in these locations” (Sumara, 1994, p. 43). Through touring, the path of travel is organized by a
tour guide around these locations for only viewing. Therefore, “a person who reads as a tourist
would…stay in the surface of the book, at a distance from the world conveyed and the characters
evoked” (Wissman et al., 2017, p. 9). However, a traveler who dwells in a new place stays long
enough to engage deeply and learn “how to live there” (Sumara, 1994, p. 44). By dwelling in
texts, readers read thoughtfully with deep imagination and thinking through texts. They read with
“an attitude of caring and attention to the texts” (Sumara, 1994, p. 45). They are aesthetically
engaged with the texts (Rosenblatt, 1978). Thus, literary engagement should be understood as
dwelling within texts and deeply thinking through something.

**Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy**

In this study, I draw on Paris’s (2012) theory of “culturally sustaining pedagogy” to guide
me to examine participants’ literary engagement. Before I talk about the theory of culturally
sustaining pedagogy (CSP), it is essential first to understand what we mean by culture. Geertz
(1973) defines culture as “the shared patterns [including language, ethnicity, religion, nationality,
and values] that set the tone, character and quality of people’s lives” (p. 216). Culture, then, is a
way of being, doing, valuing, believing, and living (Short, 2009). It is what we say and think as
we engage in different social practices. Botelho and Rudman (2009) discuss that the definition of
culture is “not static, isolated, permanent, [and] inflexible…but dynamic, relentlessly changing,
and influenced by historical, sociopolitical, and economic factors” (p. 72).

frame his theory of CSP. According to Paris (2012), CSP seeks to “perpetuate and foster—
sustain—linguistic, literate, and cultural pluralism as part of the democratic project of schooling”
(p. 95). Teaching and learning need to go beyond culturally relevant pedagogy (Ladson-Billings,
1995) and culturally responsive teaching (Gay, 2000) to foster multiculturalism, multilingualism, and multiracialism (Alim, 2007; Paris, 2012; Paris & Alim, 2014). Paris (2012) rejects the monocultural and monolingual society, and challenges educators and researchers to re-envision what it means to embrace cultural pluralism, quality, and equity into our educational system. As he argues, without sustaining linguistic and cultural pluralism, students of color will lose their heritage, language, literacy, and culture for access and achievement in the United States public schools.

Drawing on Gutierrez and Rogoff (2003), Paris (2012) argues that it is feasible for someone to be responsive without paying attention to the idea of linguistic and cultural repertoires for participating in practices. This idea of repertoires of practices asserts that “rather than pigeonholing individuals into categories and teaching to the students’ ‘traits’ or attempting to replace those traits, the emphasis would be placed on helping students develop dexterity in using both familiar and new approaches” (Gutierrez & Rogoff, 2003, p. 23). Paris suggests teachers need to take up a new stance that values students’ traits and repertoires of practices while also extending to include dominant linguistic and cultural competence. They need to be flexible as they value both the traditional and evolving practices of young people. Therefore, CSP acknowledges the importance of “linguistic, literate, and cultural pluralism without assuming that such practices are static or limited exclusively to some groups but not others” (Zoch, 2017, p. 3). Thus, students’ languages and cultures cannot be fixed or replaced with dominant ones. Paris argues that asset pedagogy research has been focused on the importance of heritage practices and ignored the shifting and changing practices of young people. There is a difference between a curriculum based on the students’ cultural-linguistic reality and the one that is culturally relevant and responsive (Alim, 2007). For example, using books about students’
lives is a culturally relevant practice, while honoring their contemporary cultural and linguistic practices is a culturally sustaining practice. Therefore, CSP invites us to rethink what our realities are.

Paris and Alim (2014) explain that CSP is intended to be a “loving critique” of the previous formations of asset pedagogies that are the foundation of CSP. Those previous formations of asset pedagogies have laid the foundation for embracing the idea of what it means to teach students who are not from dominant societies (e.g., Heath, 1983; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Moll & Gonzalez, 1994). Ladson-Billings (2014) sees CSP as a fresher or newer version of her culturally relevant pedagogy theory. She welcomes this new stance as a way to push her work forward. She contends that CSP “meets the needs of this century’s students” (p. 76).

Building on Paris (2012) and Paris and Alim (2014), McCarty and Lee (2014) studied the implementation of CSP with Native American youth learners. The authors argued that CSP should not only sustain but also revitalize and reclaim “what has been disrupted and displaced by colonization” (p. 103). They found that through sustaining and revitalizing pedagogy, teaching can support native languages and cultural practices and create a sense of belonging for students.

There are few empirical studies on CSP, and most of these studies focus on teachers’ practices when implementing the CSP framework. Through an ethnographic study, Zoch (2017) used the CSP framework to examine how four elementary school teachers designed their literacy instruction in a way that sustains their students’ cultural competence under the pressure of a high-stakes testing environment. Through implementing CSP, the author found that the teachers supported their students’ identities, cultural and linguistic pluralism, and critical consciousness. Despite using the framework of CSP, this study does not offer student data. Other authors explored two elementary teachers’ pedagogical approaches concerning monolingual language
policy (Michener, Sengupta-Irving, Proctor, & Silverman, 2015) and found that there were limited CSP practices approached by the teachers. Zoch (2017) and Michener, Sengupta-Irving, Proctor, and Silverman (2015) do not show how CSP translated from theory to practice, nor do they examine both teachers and students’ practices within classrooms.

**Translanguaging**

Translanguaging is a practical theory that promotes creating culturally and linguistically sustaining spaces (Osorio, 2020). It is a discursive language practice in which bilinguals engage to maximize their linguistic resources (Wei, 2018) and “make sense of their bilingual worlds” (García, 2009, p. 45). It is defined as “... the deployment of a speaker's full linguistic repertoire without regard for watchful adherence to the socially and politically defined boundaries of named (and usually national and state) languages” (Otheguy, García, & Reid, 2015, p. 283).

Williams (1994) was the first researcher who used the translanguaging term as a pedagogical practice in educational settings. Other researchers used similar terms such as multilanguaging (Nguyen, 2012), heteroglossia (Bakhtin, 1998), poly-language (Jørgensen, 2008), flexible bilingualism (Creese & Blackledge, 2010), code-meshing (Canagarajah, 2011), and code-switching (Martínez, 2010).

According to Creese and Blackledge (2015), translanguaging practice is not “about code-switching, but rather about an arrangement that normalizes bilingualism without diglossic functional separation” (p. 26). Translanguaging then treats bilinguals as having one language system that is flexible and rich (Osorio, 2020). Through such a system, students freely move across their languages as they construct meaning. According to Wei (2018), “translanguaging is not simply going *between* different linguistic structures, cognitive and semiotic systems, and modalities, but going *beyond* them” (p. 23). Therefore, languages are not isolated or identified
(Otheguy, García, & Reid, 2015); but function in one unitary system (Seltzer & García, 2019). García (2009) used the term “dynamic bilingualism” to explain the translanguaging practice that bilinguals engage in.

Therefore, translanguaging is not about language(s) but the message in which students contribute as they make meaning (Osorio, 2020). Students can engage in a more meaningful experience (Creese & Blackledge, 2010). As Creese and Blackledge (2010) assert, “bilingualism in the classroom is not so much about which languages but which voices are engaged in identity performance” (p. 110). Translanguaging can cultivate pride in the students’ whole selves (Seltzer & García, 2019) and welcome all voices. Thus, it is an empowering practice that can promote equity and social justice (Garcia-Mateus & Palmer, 2017; Kirsch, 2020; Osorio, 2020). As the school population is becoming more globalized, the field needs more studies that explore the implementation of translanguaging theory in primary education.

The theoretical frameworks described in this section are connected and support each other. Translanguaging is a resource for pluralistic contexts. Therefore, it is an important component in the theory of CSP. Using CSP to understand focal students’ engagement with literature allowed me to see how their transaction with the literature was mediated by various aspects of their lived experiences.

Organization of the Dissertation

This introduction chapter provides my insights into the problem in the field, my research questions, and the theoretical frameworks that guided my research. It is followed by a review of relevant literature, a discussion of the methodologies and data collection methods and analysis, three chapters on the findings, and a discussion of the interpretations and implications of this dissertation.
Chapter two reviews the empirical studies related to students’ engagement with literature in interactive read-aloud, whole classroom and small-group discussion, modes of response to literature, and connecting with families. Chapter three provides an overview of the methodology of the research study: practitioner research. I then describe the contexts, participants, and my role(s). This chapter details the data collection and analysis process of the Arabic-speaking students’ responses to picturebooks about the Middle East across multiple contexts. The findings chapters (four, five, and six) discuss data concerning my research questions. Chapter four looks at the Arabic-speaking students’ responses to literature-based read-aloud and discussion in the grade-level classrooms and ENL classroom. Chapter five explores the Arabic-speaking students’ responses to literature-based read-aloud and discussion in the culturally sustaining context. Chapter six illustrates the literary engagement of a girl and two boys across multiple contexts. Chapter seven reveals my understanding of the findings and implications of this research study for teachers, teacher educators, policymakers, and researchers.
Chapter 2

Relevant Literature

As this study explored Arabic-speaking students’ engagement during interactive read-aloud in multiple contexts, this chapter highlights the extant empirical research related to interactive read-aloud, whole classroom and small group discussion, modes of response to literature, and connecting with families. The relevant literature is connected because they all support the students’ literary engagement in an interactive environment.

Literature as a Mirror

Bishop (1990) offers the metaphors of mirrors, windows, and doors to illuminate the power of literature on young readers. Literature can have the power to mirror the reader’s life, identity, image, language, religion, and culture. It can be a window into other people’s lives and societies and a door that invites readers to different worlds. Literature has the power to shape children’s understandings, beliefs, dreams, tastes, and values about themselves and others. As Tschida, Ryan, and Ticknor (2014) discuss, literature can send specific messages to children about “who is good and who is bad, who counts and who does not, and whose experiences are deemed more important than others” (p. 30). Researchers draw on Bishop’s metaphors (Botelho & Rudman, 2009; Möller, 2014; Short, 2009; Torres, 2016; Tschida, Ryan, & Ticknor, 2014; Wissman et al., 2017) to emphasize the value of incorporating authentic diverse books into classrooms.

Literature can impact children’s views of themselves and their cultures, families, and communities (Hefflin & Barksdale-Ladd, 2001). Bishop (1997) contends “students who do not see any reflection of themselves or who see only distorted or comical once come to understand that they have little value in society in general and in school in particular” (p. 4). Thus,
interacting with diverse books is especially critical for those who are from diverse backgrounds (Au, 2001; Cai, 1998; Cartledge et al., 2015).

Botelho and Rudman’s (2009) book, *Critical Multicultural Analysis of Children Literature: Mirrors, Windows, and Doors*, points out that “children’s literature is a contested terrain, as is multicultural education” (p. x). People should define diverse literature beyond the skin color; thus, the definition must include other factors such as religions and geographical areas (Hillard, 1995). Through using the lens of critical multicultural analysis, teachers can select literature that gives power to marginalized students (May, 2011; May, Bingham, & Pendergast, 2014). Therefore, teachers need to have a critical stance to identify biases, stereotypes, and a lack of representations (Botelho & Rudman, 2009; Tschida, Ryan, & Ticknor, 2014; Wissman et al., 2017). They should consider that every work of literature has been shaped and constructed based on dominant culture’s values and beliefs (Botelho & Rudman, 2009). Therefore, the critical multicultural analysis argues that people are “responsible for how power is exercised and circulated, as well as functions as a tool for examining discourse in the text” (Botelho & Rudman, 2009, p. 118). Researchers used a critical multicultural analysis lens to examine marginalized groups’ depiction and make them more visible (e.g., Malcolm & Lowery, 2011; Raina, 2009).

Through a teacher collaborative inquiry community, Wissman et al. (2017) used global children’s literature to explore teaching and pedagogical practices in elementary classrooms. When an ENL teacher, Heather, helped her students see themselves and their experiences reflected in books they read in school, the students connected to the books, re-envisioned their bilingualism and biculturalism, articulated their background identities, and improved their reading and writing (Wissman et al., 2017). In research that looks at African American students’
reading achievement, Davis (2000) and Brooks (2006) reached similar findings. Davis’ analysis of middle school girls’ reading literature about others with similar cultural experiences showed that such literature could lead to cultural validation. The girls preferred to read books that mirrored their own life experiences. Particular African American textual features triggered middle schoolers to make meaningful connections with such texts. Among those features are cultural themes, social practices, linguistic patterns, and racism confrontations (Brooks, 2006). Through the lens of reader-response theory (Rosenblatt, 1978, 1995), Möller and Allen (2000) illustrated how four fifth-grade girls, three African American and one Hispanic, brought their lived experiences to Taylor's (1987) *The Friendship* discussion group. The authors concluded the story functioned as a way or a tool for the girls to envision themselves and their experiences and to “reflect on problematic emotions, participate in imaginary lives, negotiate social relationships, and develop their understanding of complex social issues” (p. 168). Therefore, it is about how students engage with diverse books, not merely having them present as a mirror in classrooms (Osorio, 2018).

**Interactive Read-Aloud**

Scholars have long recognized interactive reading is a vital activity to support children’s literacy learning (Arnold & Whitehurst, 1994; Lever & Sénéchal, 2011). During interactive reading, children engage in talking, communicating, and sharing knowledge (Whitehurst et al., 1994). Qualitative research also shows that in interactive read-aloud, students can make meaning by asking questions and sharing connections and predictions (May, 2011). This activity can promote the “of the moment and in the moment” discussions, instead of saving all responses until reading the whole book (Sipe, 2000, p. 272, italics in original). Therefore, the freedom to share is a means for an interactive environment (Dewey, 1938/1997). In this way, teachers engage with
their students in a collaborative and collective environment (Dewey, 1938/1997; May, 2011). Historically, teachers have understood read-aloud as a way to assess students’ comprehension of texts by asking questions during and after reading and praising correct answers (McCormick, 1977). However, this type of read aloud does not always support students who need to be actively engaged in critical interactive conversations. Research urges teachers to implement interactive read-aloud into their instruction in this era of a narrowed curriculum (Worthy et al., 2012). Thus, interactive read-aloud is marginalized in schools when teachers teach for curriculum, not for students’ needs and interests. Researchers urge teachers to move to a more learner-centered curriculum (e.g., Anders, Hoffman, & Duffy, 2000). Through a practitioner inquiry in urban elementary classrooms, Ballenger (2009) explored the power of following the students’ leads and centering their voices in the curriculum. Through her philosophy of “stopping time,” she took her time to listen and reflect on her students’ “puzzling moments.” As she asserted, “curriculum is always a work in progress, shaped by interaction with particular students” (p. 107). Thus, when students’ experiences are at the center of the curriculum, learning becomes relevant, engaging, and interactive (Nieto, 2010; Souto-Manning, 2010, Souto-Manning & Cheruvu, 2016).

Through a close analysis of first and second-grade monolingual students’ responses to storybooks during read-aloud, five categories (personal, analytical, transparent, intertextual, and performative) emerged that show how students engaged in active meaning constructions (Sipe, 2000). According to Sipe (2008), personal response refers to readers’ connection to life experiences. Thus, readers may voice their own experiences by predicting what is happening in the story. In terms of transparent response, readers enter the story’s world and express their reaction to the characters there. They may behave as if “the story were real and the characters
were actually alive” (Sipe, 2008, p. 173). For the performative response, readers may enter the story world and predict what might happen based on their purposes. Readers might use the story’s context for their purposes by adding their voices and creating their predictions. In this way, readers manipulate and control the text, and that illuminates how they are “aesthetically expressive” (Sipe, 2008, p. 173). While intertextual response refers to readers’ connections to other texts, analytical response explains how readers make meaning by providing detailed descriptions and expectations about the illustrations and the story’s characters (Sipe, 2008). Sipe argues children should activate all these aspects to gain a rich literary understanding. While Sipe focused on fiction texts, Maloch and Beutel (2010) considered both fiction and non-fiction texts. Building on Sipe (2000, 2008), Maloch and Beutel (2010) explored second-grade diverse students’ responses and initiations during interactive read-aloud. After analyzing the students’ initiations, the authors came up with six categories: prediction, observation, connection, clarifying, “entering story world” (Sipe, 2000), and direct process. These studies reflect the variety of responses students can share during interactive meaning-making of literature.

Through using ethnographic and discourse analytic methods, May (2011) studied diverse upper elementary students’ responses to read-alouds of informational texts. She contended the teacher’s animating-talk promoted a welcoming classroom environment arguing for the need for teachers to notice their students’ responses to cultural issues in texts. From these responses, teachers could ask questions that lead to more analytical and critical thinking. As a part of a one-year-long ethnographic study that focused on a second-grade language arts classroom, Worthy et al. (2012) studied one teacher’s instructional practices and the nature of students’ talk during read-aloud and dialogue. The authors found that when the students and the teacher engaged collaboratively in open-ended discussions about thought-provoking literature, the students
developed their critical thinking and actively shared their perspectives and feelings. When using interactive read-aloud with texts that highlight specific social issues, bilingual fourth-grade students engaged in critical discussions that promoted their social awareness through deconstructing and reconstructing their interpretations of texts (Peterson & Chamberlain, 2015).

**Read-Aloud and Bilingualism**

Several research studies have highlighted the value of encouraging bilingualism in read-aloud discussions (Worthy et al., 2013; García-Mateus & Palmer, 2017; Osorio, 2020). In first-grade Spanish-English dual-language classrooms, Osorio (2020) and García-Mateus and Palmer (2017) used diverse children’s literature that mirrors their students’ cultural and linguistic backgrounds. They found that engaging in read-aloud that promoted translanguaging invited the students to use all their linguistic resources freely. Translanguaging then served as a means of promoting positive bilingual identities (García-Mateus & Palmer, 2017). The work of Worthy et al. (2013) that explored literature read-aloud discussion in a fifth-grade bilingual classroom illuminates the educational and linguistic benefits of a context in which multilingualism and multiculturalism were promoted and privileged. The authors concluded students were more inclined to flexibly draw on their own cultural and linguistic repertoires in such a low-risk context.

**Read-Aloud and Critical Conversation**

Critical literacy is a way of being and thinking, stance, or perspective through which we participate in our everyday lives (Vasquez, 1994, 2014, 2017). According to Lewison, Leland, and Harste (2015):

Critical literacy practices encourage students to use language to question the everyday world, to interrogate the relationship between language and power, to analyze popular
culture and media, to understand how power relationships are socially constructed, and to consider actions that can be taken to promote social justice. (p. 3)

Thus, we need to develop our language to consciously critique what is expected (Janks, 2012). Being critical requires understanding what counts as knowledge (Loh, 2009). It involves understanding how knowledge is constructed and how it can be a source of power. Being critical entails using popular culture and media to question how people are positioned, portrayed, and constructed in specific ways (Marsh, 2000) and what messages we receive regarding what should be valued and devalued (Lewison, Leland, & Harste, 2015). According to Freire (2000), we should develop our critical consciousness through questioning our realities and what has been understood as truth. Therefore, critical literacy is viewed as challenging the unquestioned legitimacy of unequal power relationships (Anderson & Irvine, 1993) through “reexamining comfortable cultural practices and values” (Dozier, Johnston, & Rogers, 2006, p. 19). Taking a critical stance requires understanding how language can be used to label groups as dominant and non-dominant, how this language of labeling can be used as cultural resources, how marginalized groups can get access to the dominant world without devaluing their way of being or doing, and how social action can transform oppression practices (Lewison, Leland, & Harste, 2015).

Building instruction around students’ life experiences is connected to Freire’s (2000) generative themes, which can be a means to empower people. They are social, cultural, educational, or political topics that are of interest to people. Freire suggests these themes can be located in cultural circles where all members come up with ideas from their own experiences. Within these generative themes, Freire discusses limit-situations, which are identified as constraints that disfranchise people’s abilities to critique the world around them. When people engage in a collective discussion, they could reflect and ask questions. This discussion should
lead to liberation, “as the objective to be achieved” (Freire, 2000, p. 103). Thus, people should be agents for change to surmount limit-situations or themes to empower themselves and each other. Freire emphasizes, “the generative theme cannot be found in people, divorced from reality… It can only be apprehended in the human-world relationship” (p. 106). Through such a relationship, students can come up with their generative themes. Importantly, students need to feel their themes are rooted in a situation to critically unveil their reality and take action (Freire, 2000). To understand students’ themes, according to Freire, is to investigate the students’ thinking as well as their reality. Understanding the students’ themes involves creating a democratic and dialogical environment where all voices are welcomed. Identifying the themes would then be followed by a critical and active investigation.

To Vasquez (2014), all texts can be read from a critical stance. Readers can critically analyze texts through questions like, “what is this text trying to do to me? whose interests are marginalized or privileged by this text? whose voices are dominant? whose reality is ignored?” (Vasquez, 2014, p. 4) and “how could it be told differently?” (Comber, 2001, p. 1). As Lewis (2000) argues, “literature discussions should invite readers to question the discourses that shape their experiences as well as to resist textual ideology that promotes dominant cultural assumption” (p. 261). Educators need to bear in mind the issues related to “limits of identification” (Lewis, 2000), which means that if they are only reading books to identify personally with characters, they may miss the opportunity to take a critical stance. Therefore, there is a need to broaden the aesthetic stance (Rosenblatt, 1982) and support critical reading.

**Whole Classroom Discussion of Literature**

From a variety of perspectives, scholars have extensively shown that reading and discussing literature is beneficial for mainstream students (Lewis, 2001; Rosenblatt, 1978; Sipe,
1996, 2000, 2002, 2008) as well as bilingual students (Martínez-Roldán, 2000, 2003; Worthy et al., 2013). Freire (2000) contended there is a need to make learning a more dialogical and communicative process where all members’ points of view are respected, trusted, and valued. Thus, through dialogue, individuals can make meaning of their own experiences and the world they live in. Sociocultural perspectives suggest it is fundamental to establish an environment based on social interaction facilitated by an adult (May, 2011; Maloch & Beutel, 2010; Short et al., 1999; Sipe, 2000, 2008; Vygotsky, 1978). Thus, teachers have a critical role in supporting students’ dialogue in literature discussions (Möller, 2002). By inviting students to act as leaders and knowers, teachers could create a positive, interactive, and welcoming classroom atmosphere (May, 2011; Maloch & Beutel, 2010). Thus, trusting students as talkers, readers, and thinkers leads them to freely respond to literature (Rosenblatt, 1978, 1995). May’s (2011) view of culturally relevant teaching indicates it is essential for teachers to have three social positions during their classroom discussions: “cultural advocate, facilitator of classroom interactions, and teacher of reading” (p. 28). In research that considered one teacher’s responses to her students during literature discussions, the teacher engaged in certain responses, including restating, re-voicing, clarifying, naming, and extending, that validated the students’ initiations and contributions and positioned them “as more active participants in the reading process” (Maloch & Beutel, 2010, p. 28). As May (2011) suggests, it is crucial to position a student as “someone with information” (p. 15) to support his/her understanding of texts. Thus, students need freedom when interacting with picture books because such texts tend to be “less directed” than linear or printed-based texts (Serafini, 2012). Such literary texts have unique formats, fonts, illustrations, and narratives that lead readers to think, connect, and predict. They support the children’s aesthetic reading and help them to be more creative and critical thinkers. Such literature invites
multiple perspectives from different sociocultural backgrounds and engages students in deep
discussions about the story and its features. It teaches readers about “literary and artistic codes
and conventions, … visual literacy skills, and interpretive strategies” (Pantaleo, 2002, p. 82).

Through a critical analysis that focused on adolescent students from diverse and working-
class backgrounds, Beach, Thein, and Parks (2008) studied students’ identities when responding
to diverse texts. They examined how family, home, workplace, school, sport, and community
could influence students’ identities. The students engaged in discussion and critiqued different
perspectives about race, class, and gender. When they engaged in journal writing where they
wrote issues that might be hard for them to share, their teacher, Parks, shared some quotes from
these journals to enhance the discussion. He encouraged students to “focus on how their own
experiences as texts were constructed or mediated by language and narratives” (p. 124). He also
facilitated the discussions and avoided “privileging some students’ interpretations over others or
critiquing students’ voicing of certain discourses” (p. 272). Beach et al. (2008) provided multiple
case study profiles that illustrate six students who “demonstrated different degrees of change in
their participation in various discourses” (p. 139). After analyzing the students’ responses and
behaviors across multiple contexts, Beach et al. concluded how culture could play a significant
role in shaping how people function in their lives. They found, “students’ ability to critique
discourses of race, class, and gender varied according to their race, class, and gender identities
and their prior experiences” (p. 257).

Researchers have found elementary students can challenge themselves through critically
discussing texts that perpetuate complex cultural issues related to social justice and racism in
classrooms (Campano, 2007; Möller, 2002). For example, in Möller’s (2002) study, the fourth-
grade African American students made connections between what they read in Run Away Home
(McKissack, 1997) and a racial crime they heard in the news. The students discussed racism was still happening in their lives. The work of Campano (2007) also documented the power of using students’ life experiences as texts in classrooms. When he valued his fifth-grade immigrants’ personal narratives in the classroom, the students generated discussion around immigration and social justice issues.

According to Souto-Manning (2009), one book can “serve as a tool for critical dialogue and action” (p. 65). To create a community atmosphere that privileges diversity, Souto-Manning (2009) used diverse books to evoke critical discussions in her first-grade diverse classroom in which students noticed the racial and social segregation practices in their school. However, books that normalize the dominant culture’s experiences might discourage marginalized readers from thinking critically (Jones, 2012). For example, when reading Henry and Mudge and the Best Day of All (Rylant, 1995), a text that reflects a white family who lives a materially rich lifestyle, with second-grade economically disadvantaged girls, one girl positioned herself in the text by making a topical connection counter to her lived experiences (Jones, 2012). Rather than critiquing the text, the girl aligned herself with the text. Nevertheless, exploring disconnections between life experiences and texts might lead readers toward engaging critically with the texts (Jones & Clarke, 2007; Jones, Clarke, & Enriquez, 2010). For example, students might explore injustice in the world. Therefore, researchers urge teachers to encourage both connections and disconnections to support critical engagement.

Through engaging in critical discussions around diverse books, students can confront stereotypes and build cross-cultural understandings (Aziz, 2016). Despite the documented importance of incorporating critical discussions around diverse books, sometimes active discussions might lead to stereotyping (e.g., Evans, 1996), “either toward group members or
members of cultures presented in the books” (Möller, 2002, p. 468). One study examined two first-grade classrooms and a third-grade ENL classroom when teachers and students explored picturebooks about Muslim cultures in literature circles (Aziz, 2016). During a discussion of Mirror (Baker, 2010), the students in this study used “us” and “them” to compare the cultures in the two countries, urban Australia and rural Morocco, presented in the book (Aziz, 2016). However, after an in-depth investigation in both countries, the students noticed the omission of rural lives in Australia and high buildings in Morocco. The students realized the book was not accurate because it depicted one picture of these countries and decided to make it more authentic by making some changes (Aziz, 2016). Aziz’s study reflects how it is pivotal to use multiple books when learning about foreign cultures (Tschida, Ryan, & Ticknor, 2014), instead of relying on a “single story” (Adichie, 2009).

Although critical literacy is gaining focus in the educational field, some teachers may not be comfortable maintaining it in classrooms (Copenhaver, 2000; Dozier, Johnston, & Rogers, 2006; Lazar & Offenberg, 2011). They might feel unprepared to discuss issues around race, justice, power, culture, identity, and immigration (Musetti, Salas, & Murray, 2016). Thus, they tend to avoid books that tackle conversational topics around discrimination and difference (Ketter & Lewis, 2001; Riley & Crawford-Garrett, 2016). In a study that used qualitative and quantitative approaches to explore teachers’ use of picturebooks about African American cultures and heritages, Lazar and Offenberg (2011) found that most teachers tended to elicit students’ responses that did not emphasize critical discussions about racism.

**Small-Group Literature Discussion**

Through engaging in small group literature discussions, students can collaboratively co-construct meaning (Martínez-Roldán, 2000). Cultural and ethnic identities mediate students’
construction of knowledge (Martínez-Roldán, 2003). Dutro’s (2008) work with literature
discussions brings a unique dimension to the concept of reader response. She contends students
may have few opportunities to share deeply felt responses, including responses highlighting
traumatic experiences. Therefore, she argues teachers “must do much more than witness
students’ stories from a distance” (p. 431). In her research with fifth-grade African American
girls in a book club discussion, one girl’s connection to a character who had lost her mother led
to a detailed discussion among other girls about death and loss experiences. Dutro’s book club
shows how the girls engaged in deeply felt discussion in the space of testimony and witness.
Dutro stresses that instead of primarily focusing on an event in books and steering uncomfortable
conversations to “safer ground” (p. 431), teachers must truly hear and connect students’ stories to
“something deeply felt in our own entwinements of life and literature, if we can hope to be
effective witnesses” (p. 432). Osorio (2018a) implemented humanizing pedagogical practices in
an emergent bilingual second-grade classroom through Freirean culture circles, Latinx children’s
literature, and small group critical dialogic discussions. She found a need to blur the lines
between the teacher and students to promote the development of critical consciousness.

**Modes of Response to Literature**

Whereas students use multiple sign systems to respond to their world in their out-of-
school spaces (Short, Kauffman, & Kahn, 2000; Vasudevan & Wissman, 2011), these systems
need to be incorporated into classrooms so students can have the opportunity to broaden their
learning and gain a deeper understanding. In their study of fourth and fifth-grade diverse
classrooms, Short, Kauffman, and Kahn (2000) found students engaged in transamination across
sign systems when responding to literature. Through math, art, poem, music, and drama, students
supported their understandings of literature and life. Short, Kauffman, and Kahn contend all sign systems are potential tools where students can explore and communicate new ideas.

Response to literature involves the dramatizations that students spontaneously perform while enacting their own meaning-making (Adomat, 2010). Researchers argue for the use of drama with readers who struggle (Adomat, 2009, 2010, 2012; Wilhelm, 2007). Drama can promote students’ active engagement and understanding of literature (Adomat, 2005, 2009, 2010, 2012). In Adomat’s (2009) work with primary graders, she found that through entering the story world, students understood and moved beyond the literal meaning of the story, playing with their language and gestures and incorporating their interests and needs. Thus, drama supported students’ imaginations and social interactions. Drawing on Sipe’s (2008) performative response, Adomat (2010) explored one second-grade reader’s responses to picturebook read-aloud. The child built a literary understanding through different modalities: gesture, movement, mime, vocal intonation, and dramatization. Adomat’s line of research shows how “drama allows young children an avenue of exploring meaning in texts that they are unable to read” (Adomat, 2012, p. 349).

Art is another way students can communicate personal ideas with the world. Drawing from the cultural model (Gee, 1999), Jewett (2011) explored cultures with her first-grade classroom. Through children’s literature, the students engaged effectively in different literacy activities, such as reading, writing, drawing, photographing, and acting, that helped them to understand their own and other people’s cultures. Through incorporating Short’s (2008) idea of the “cultural x-ray,” Jewett (2011) aimed to promote children’s deep understanding of their own cultural identities and global cultures. Through cultural x-rays, students write what is noticeable to the public around a character’s figure, and what is hidden is placed in the heart of the figure.
(Short, 2009). The purpose is to go deeper into the values and beliefs of the people within the
culture or what matters to them. Jewett (2011) found students relied on “surface level aspects of
culture to identify deeper levels of culture” (p. 23). Thus, after they identified one aspect of the
characters in the story, they engaged in conversation to form a deeper understanding of it.
Another related line of inquiry with older students explored how middle school ENLs of
Mexican heritage learned more about their cultural and linguistic identities through producing
their graphic novels or comics (Danzak, 2011). By reading and discussing literature that tells
stories of immigration, interviewing families, and journaling, the students produced their own
experiences as graphic stories.

Response to literature also involves storytelling, which can be a social activity people
engage in their everyday lives. Storytelling is a natural activity that could provide detailed
perspectives on specific issues of the students’ lives. Through a qualitative study that employed a
critical discourse analysis, Martínez-Roldán (2003) examined the recent immigrant experience of
a Mexican-born second-grade girl, Isabela, as she used oral narratives—storytelling—in small
group literature discussions in a bilingual classroom. Access to the narrative, based on cultural
funds of knowledge, and native language enabled Isabela to participate in the discussion and
construct cultural and academic identities. Martínez-Roldán’s line of inquiry is situated
differently than the other reader response and literary discussion studies because it focuses on the
narratives of personal experiences. It invites us to rethink the idea of cultural ways of telling
(Heath, 1983). Other Spanish-speaking students in Martínez-Roldán and Lopez-Robertson’s
(1999) study were storytellers in their first-grade bilingual classroom but had unsolidified story-
structure. Similarly, the Trackton students in Heath’s (1983) ethnographic study were creative
storytellers. For them, the experience of read-aloud discussion at school was a means for
negotiation and socialization. Storytelling was expected to entertain and include fiction to engage the audience. They adopted unique perspectives from their social norms and cultural milieus.

Whereas the incorporation of multimodalities in classrooms can promote students’ literacies (Jewitt, 2005; Vasudevan, 2010, 2011; Vasudevan & Wissman, 2011), integrating them in classroom instruction is not enough. Teachers are encouraged to provide “complementary symbolic spaces” that enable students to draw on their repertoire of practices that they encountered “outside school to inform and enrich their engagement with disciplinary literacies they encountered within school” (Wissman, Costello, & Hamilton, 2012, p. 336). Therefore, re-envisioning what counts as literacy is needed when maintaining such spaces in classrooms.

According to Barton and Hamilton (2012), literacy is constructed through interactions and these interactions and social practices are shaped by the social domain. Social practices are mediated by texts and the space between thoughts and texts is what one brings and what the other person brings. Thus, literacy is all about communication (Rowe, 2010).

**Connecting with Families**

Through learning from families and using them as resources, teachers can enhance the curriculum (McIntyre et al., 2001). Therefore, building trusting and caring relationships with families is fundamental to better understand students’ needs (Kyle et al., 2002). Through parent-teacher communication, teachers can learn about students’ everyday literacy practices. As Dail and Payne (2010) discuss, literacy is defined as socially situated practices that are enhanced within the context of family life. Studies have highlighted the importance of creating a link between school and home and how that requires teachers to accept diversity and value and honor students’ cultural beliefs, linguistic backgrounds, and everyday practices (Amanti, 2005; Delpit, 2012; Lahman & Park, 2004; Li, 2002; Lowery, 2011; McIntyre et al., 2001; Möller, 2012;
Amanti (2005) highlights that when using diverse books, teachers should be knowledgeable about their students’ everyday lives. She argues the lack of knowledge about the students’ cultural backgrounds leads to marginalizing them. In the “funds of knowledge” project, Amanti (2005) focused on the students’ everyday life experiences rather than traditions or stereotypes. Through home visits, she learned about the students and their community’s demographic characteristics. She argues teachers should choose literature that is relevant to their students’ real and actual lives. Thus, teachers should consider their students’ social identities “not as problems, but rather as profound sources of knowledge” (Campano, 2007, p. 16).

McNair (2013) investigated the effect of family literacy workshops, which aimed to increase the knowledge about African American children’s literature in 10 middle-class African American families and their kindergarten through second-grade children. After conducting open-ended interviews with parents and collecting students’ artifacts and home reading logs, McNair found that these workshops and books influenced the families’ knowledge and led them to spend more time reading with their children. Thus, even the most educated parents did not know that there are books that mirror their own lives. The families valued African American children’s literature, and shared this information between themselves and each other. McNair emphasized the value of collaborations between teachers, parents, schools, communities, and libraries.

Another study investigated the impact of a bilingual family literacy program on Latino families’ interaction with their pre-kindergarten through fifth-grade children around bilingual storybooks (Wessels, 2014). After analyzing interviews, surveys, and field notes, the author found families reported this program helped them value spending more time engaging in literacy activities with
their children when reading books. While the literature used in Wessels’s study was bilingual, it did not necessarily reflect Latino culture.

This body of literature highlights how an interactive and responsive environment can influence elementary students to engage in critical and multimodal responses to children’s literature. It also emphasizes the value of home-school collaborations, where families and their children can feel honored and welcomed in schools. While this body of literature served as a strong foundation for investigating this study, it does not contain any research exploring Arabic-speaking students’ engagement with literature about the Middle East. This dissertation study contributes understanding to the field of children’s responses to literature about their lives, diverse book research, and translanguaging in read-aloud discussions.
Chapter 3
Methodology

This qualitative, descriptive, and naturalistic study took place in an elementary public school in a mid-size city in the northeast of the United States. The study explores Arabic-speaking students’ engagement with children’s literature about the Middle East across multiple contexts over 14 months. Given my role in creating one of three contexts in the school in which I collected data, this study is also informed by practitioner research. I aimed to conduct my research in a public elementary school that had a group of Arabic-speaking students who were new immigrants, refugees, or first generation. My rationale behind choosing such a setting was to illuminate typical Arabic-speaking students’ literary engagement in a United States public school. This chapter describes my study’s methodology; it also explains the data collection methods and analysis processes of the data sets.

Practitioner Research

Cochran-Smith and Lytle (2009) define teaching as “knowledge generation for practice from practice” (p. 21). Teachers can have an active role in establishing a democratic environment that pays close attention to the individual student. Furthermore, teachers can “take active responsibility for raising serious questions about what they teach, how they are to teach, and what the large goals are for which they are striving” (Giroux, 1988, p. 126) (as cited in Fanning & Schmidt, 2007, p. 35). Thus, teachers need to be active creators of knowledge themselves. They can learn from being close to their students, reflecting on their practices, and sharing experiences with their colleagues. Campano (2007) states “the professional knowledge of teaching … is an ongoing act of creation that occurs when teachers adopt a critical inquiry stance in their classrooms” (p. 92). Through inquiry, teachers can engage in “highly systematic
observation and documentation of learners and their sensemaking” (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009, p. 44) and represent their practices in a more powerful and story-like way. Readers learn from others’ stories; indeed, “every published piece has other stories to tell, hidden texts to reveal, unanswered questions to ponder” (Fecho, 2003, p. 282). In practitioner research, teaching is regarded as an endeavor to “generate questions rather than answers, multiple possibilities rather than sure solutions, diverging perspectives rather than particular viewpoints” (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009, p. 114).

Practitioner research leads to broader and deeper understandings. Fecho (2003) asserts that a “practitioner’s perspective is … necessary if we are to understand to fuller depth and breadth what occurs in classrooms” (p. 283). Therefore, this inquiry helped me provide an in-depth, holistic, detailed, and descriptive account for teachers in diverse classrooms.

Practitioner research, then, is about gaining a better understanding of teaching and learning to attain equity and quality in education. It aims to establish a democratic environment that respects and listens to all voices. As Cochran-Smith and Lytle (2009) remark, this inquiry is about “enhancing educators’ sense of social responsibility and social action in the service of a democratic society… [It] is based on a deep and profound sense of accountability for students’ learning and life chances” (p. 58). Through practitioner inquiry, teachers craft their curriculum, a curriculum that meets students’ needs, histories, experiences, and social identities. Cochran-Smith and Lytle (2009) discuss how it is significant to establish a critical collaboration between all participants and create social change and justice. Thus, it is important to understand participants’ identities and backgrounds “not as problems, but rather as profound sources of knowledge that could help us illuminate aspects of our shared world and inform the ways in which we conceptualize our pedagogies” (Campano, 2007, p. 16). Indeed, all participants in this
type of research “are regarded as knowers, learners, and researchers” (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009, p. 42).

Methods of Data Collection

As a qualitative researcher, I need to be descriptive and specific on how, where, and when I conducted my research. The following illustrates the contexts, participants, phases of data collection, types of data collected, data analysis procedures, the researcher’s role(s), and validity and trustworthiness.

School Context

This qualitative descriptive study took place in an elementary public school in a mid-size city in the northeast of the United States. The school has a dual-language program in Spanish and English. The most current data from the 2018-2019 school year showed that approximately 26% of students are ENL learners. The school had a diverse population with approximately 23% African American, 43% Hispanic, 12% Asian, and 6% multicultural. Based on the school’s records, Arabic-speaking students are identified as Asian, Asian Arabic, White, and sometimes by their country of origin. This study looked across three distinct contexts: grade-level classroom, ENL classroom, and culturally sustaining context.

Grade-Level Context

During the 2017-2018 school year, I observed three grade-level classrooms (two firsts and one second). There were two focal students in each classroom. For 2018-2019, I narrowed my focus to one second-grade classroom with three focal students. By beginning my study within the three grade-level classrooms, my goal was to have a broader perspective before I moved to a more detailed examination of similarities and differences across contexts.
The grade-level classroom has a large rug area, which was the place where read-alouds occurred. Round tables were at different places in the classrooms. After the read-aloud sessions, students went back to their tables to reflect on the stories through writing or to work on other activities.

**ENL Context**

In the ENL context, there were a variety of home languages such as Spanish, French, and Korean. I observed the focal students during the pull-out time in their ENL classroom throughout 2018 when students were taken out of their grade-level classroom and provided with enriched instruction. The students were at different English proficiency levels. Mostly, the ENL teacher worked with mixed-level proficiency groups in another setting. Sometimes the teachers “pulled out” the students from their classrooms based on proficiency level and the teacher read the same book with each group (usually on the same day and sometimes different day). The ENL classroom is a small room with a small rug area and two round tables. Similar to the grade-level classroom, the rug area was the read-aloud place.

**Culturally Sustaining Context I’m Teaching**

In the culturally sustaining context, I met with the focal students in the ENL teacher-room whenever it was available. Mostly, I joined the students in a quiet corner with a small half-circle table in the hallway. I met with the students during their classroom time when they worked on their homework and sometimes during the ENL pull-outs. Working in the hallway was not perceived as unusual by the focal students, and they were quite accustomed to working (and watching other people) in this space as an extension of the classroom. I sat on the straight side of the table in a chair the same size as those of the students, and the students sat around the curved part so they could see and touch (if they wished) the book. In the culturally sustaining context, I
supported informal and spontaneous discussions where students could talk freely and move around without any constraints. Students needed to raise their hands to participate in the discussions in the more structured grade-level and ENL classrooms. In the culturally sustaining context, I honored the students’ contemporary cultural and linguistic practices. Thus, I focused on building authentic relationships with the focal students and centering their lived experiences. The students had the freedom to engage in translanguaging and explore themselves and the world. Table 1 summarizes my role in the three settings and the predominant methods.

**Table 1**

*Research Settings, My Role, and Methods*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>My role</th>
<th>Grade-Level</th>
<th>ENL</th>
<th>Culturally Sustaining</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participant-observer</td>
<td>-----Participant-observer-----</td>
<td>Observant-participant</td>
<td>Observant-participant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Researcher</td>
<td>-------Researcher-------</td>
<td>Teacher &amp; Researcher</td>
<td>Teacher &amp; Researcher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observe read-alouds</td>
<td>----Observe read-alouds-----</td>
<td>Conduct read-alouds</td>
<td>Conduct read-alouds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My role</td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Methods</strong></td>
<td><strong>Methods</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Researcher</td>
<td>------Observations------</td>
<td>Observations</td>
<td>Audiotape</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-----------Field Notes-------------</td>
<td>Field Notes</td>
<td>Observations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-----Semi-structured interviews----</td>
<td>Semi-structured interviews</td>
<td>Semi-structured interviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Audiotape</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

41
Participants

The study involved six Arabic-speaking students (one girl and five boys) in first and second grade (rising second and third) classrooms. The students’ countries of origin were Syria, Iraq, and Yemen. The grade-level and ENL classroom teachers read literature about the Middle East with their whole classrooms. In the culturally sustaining context, as a teacher-researcher, I engaged in interactive read-aloud with the focal students while exploring them.

Participants also included the students’ teachers. Initially, I worked with three grade-level classroom teachers, one second-grade and two first-grade; in the 2018-2019 academic year, I worked with one second-grade classroom teacher.

Table 2

Focal Students and Teachers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>January 2018 - June 2018</th>
<th>September 2018 - April 2019</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Teacher Name</strong></td>
<td><strong>Grade</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Nancy</td>
<td>ENL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Olivia</td>
<td>1st</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Mari</td>
<td>1st</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Lucy</td>
<td>2nd</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* All names used throughout this research study are pseudonyms.

After I received the principal and the teachers’ consent (Appendices B and C), I met with the Arabic-speaking students’ families after school in late June, during a pick-up time, to explain
my study and answer their questions. Parents had the option to sign the form and leave it with me or take it home and send back the signed forms to Ms. Nancy (the ENL teacher). Parents received consent forms in both English and Arabic. Appendix D represents an example of the parent consent form. I received approval from two families. Ms. Nancy passed out the family consent forms and the child assent forms to the families who could not meet me after school in early September 2017. She also passed out the English-speaking students’ and the ENL students’ consent forms by late November. Each ENL student received consent forms in their native language, Spanish, French, and Korean. Ms. Nancy collected the forms for me. I could not secure approval from all the English-speaking students in the grade-level classrooms. I also could not secure approval from all the ENL students in the second-year (2018-2019) group. Therefore, I did not record the read-alouds in the grade-level classrooms and the ENL classroom. I only recorded the ENL classroom from January 2018 until June 2018.

I received the parent consent forms by the end of November, and arranged with Ms. Nancy to set up an appropriate time for me to meet with the focal students. I met with the six focal students whose parents signed the consent forms by early December. Our meeting took place during school hours, specifically during their ENL pull-out time, in a computer room that had a round table. I explained, in child-friendly language, the purpose of my study. I read and explained the child assent form, which was written in both Arabic and English. All six students were excited about participating in the study. Appendix E represents an example of the student assent form.

Once parental and child permissions were secured, I developed a list of the focal students eligible to participate in the study. In the 2018-2019 academic year, I focused on three focal students due to the changes in their schedule that did not allow me to meet with all of them
simultaneously. Table 3 provides an overall description of all focal students. Participants in this study could revoke permission for participation at any time. The focal students’ participation was voluntary.

**Table 3**

*Focal Students*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Origin</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Siblings</th>
<th>Birth Order</th>
<th>Moved to USA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mai</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Yemen</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Brother</td>
<td>Older</td>
<td>2016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yan</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Born: Syria From Iraq</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Brother</td>
<td>Younger</td>
<td>2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ziad</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Syria</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2 Brothers; 1 Sister</td>
<td>Third</td>
<td>2016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moya</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Syria</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2 Brothers; 1 Sister</td>
<td>Second</td>
<td>2016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Omar</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Iraq</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1 Brother</td>
<td>Older</td>
<td>2014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moh</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Iraq</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2 Sisters; 1 Brother</td>
<td>Youngest</td>
<td>2014</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Phases of Data Collection**

In keeping with the Institutional Review Board’s formal approval of research, my dissertation study took place within fourteen-months, starting from January 2018 through April
2019. The study was organized in three phases. During phase 1, throughout January 2018, the goal was to become familiar with the focal students, the ELA and ENL teachers’ styles, and the classroom culture. Within this phase, I observed the participants during break times and recess. During any interactive reading, I observed their classrooms to get a general sense of how they usually respond to literature. The observations lasted for 30-40 minutes in each classroom. I interviewed the focal students as a group.

Phase 2 was the most intensive phase of data collection. It consisted of two sub-stages. In phase 2a (from late January 2018 to June 2018), I observed grade-level (2 first, 1 second) classrooms when they engaged in read-alouds of literature about the Middle East. There were 4-5 read-aloud observations in each grade-level classroom. I observed nine read-alouds of literature about the Middle East in the ENL classroom. I interviewed grade-level and ENL classroom teachers individually. In phase 2b (from September 2018 to March 2019), I observed four read-alouds of any literature (most of the books had Christmas and Thanksgiving themes) in the ENL classroom. I conducted general observations in the second-grade classroom throughout phase 2b. I observed seven read-alouds of literature about the Middle East in the second-grade classroom. I also conducted two interviews with Ms. Sofia. I conducted 18 read-aloud sessions within the culturally sustaining context with the focal students throughout phases 2a and 2b.

In phase 3 (from the end of January 2019 to April 2019), I continued my general observation in the second-grade classroom. I interviewed the focal students’ mothers once and individually for the first time. I then continued communicating with families through WhatsApp throughout this phase. I also interviewed Ms. Sofia, Ms. Nancy, and the focal students. During the last week of this phase, I scheduled a visit to meet with the focal students and celebrate my relationship with them. The three phases of the study are summarized in table 4.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phase 1</th>
<th>Phase 2</th>
<th>Phase 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>General Observation</td>
<td>Audiotape/ observe Read-Alouds ME (ENL)</td>
<td>General observation (2nd-grade &amp; ENL classroom)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Interviews</td>
<td>Observe Read-alouds ME (2 firsts and 1 second grade classrooms)</td>
<td>Observe Read-alouds ME (2nd-grade classroom)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Teacher Interviews</td>
<td>Teacher Interviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Audiotape/ conduct read-alouds (Culturally Sustaining Context)</td>
<td>Audiotape/ conduct read-alouds (Culturally Sustaining Context)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4

*Phases of Data Collection*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>January – February</th>
<th>March – June</th>
<th>September – December</th>
<th>January – April</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Phase 1</td>
<td>Phase 2</td>
<td>Phase 3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>a</strong></td>
<td><strong>b</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- **Phase 1:**
  - General Observation
  - Student Interviews
    - Audiotape/ conduct read-alouds (Culturally Sustaining Context)

- **Phase 2:**
  - General observation in 2nd grade classroom
  - Family interviews

- **Phase 3:**
  - Teacher Interviews
  - Student Interviews
Types of Data Collected

The data collected included observational field notes; interviews with students, teachers, and families; literature read-alouds in multiple contexts; multimodal responses to literature; and transcriptions. The types of data collected are summarized in table 4.

Observational Field Notes

I kept handwritten observational field notes throughout the research study in a notebook. The notes were of various types. I took notes as I observed the focal students’ classrooms, playground, gym, and recess sessions. I documented literacy activities in which the focal students were engaged. I also noted how participant teachers managed their classrooms. The notebook contained summaries of my informal conversations with the focal students and teachers and self-reflective comments about the focal students’ learning and response style. Some notes included Arabic words (shared by the focal students) and drawings related to the classroom seating arrangements. I kept jotting notes to make sure that even subtle details were not missed, including the focal students’ feelings and physical expressions. I preserved my handwritten notes on my password-protected laptop by typing and scanning some pages. As I typed, I added my reflections and thinking.

Interviews

During phase 1, I conducted an open-ended interview with the focal students to explore their interests and needs. This interview was audio-recorded and transcribed. Through this interview, I established a welcoming and friendly environment where students could feel comfortable sharing themselves. As Josselson (2013) argues, “if the participant is not comfortable in the interview situation, he or she will not be expressing deeply felt emotions” (p. 26). Therefore, my questions (see Appendix G) were inviting and open-ended (e.g., tell us
I conducted multiple open-ended interviews with the focal students and their mothers, ELA, and ENL teachers. Interviewing is a vital tool for teacher-researchers (Shagoury & Power, 2012). Through interviews, I learned about the interviewees’ reflective views about using literature about the Middle East. My questions were semi-structured and interviewee-centered. Interviewing the focal students helped me explore why they respond to literature in specific ways in classrooms and in culturally sustaining contexts. Listening to each teacher’s views regarding the focal students’ literary engagement and their mothers’ perspectives on cultural identities, readings, and the use of native language provided interesting insights that supported my explorations. As qualitative researchers, I aimed to pay attention to participants, their stories, how they shared their stories, and how they positioned themselves in the broader society. I endeavored to actively listen and be responsive. As Josselson (2013) explains, “The active engagement of listening invites the participant to discuss the depth and complexity of his or her experience” (p. 5). Therefore, I aimed to be present and follow the participants’ leads.

I conducted open-ended interviews with the students individually or/and as a group to explore their views regarding the literature about the Middle East or anything relevant to the study. I conducted open-ended one-on-one interviews with the teachers to find out about their thoughts regarding focal students’ engagements and explore their views of the incorporation of literature about the Middle East. Although the teachers did not observe the culturally sustaining context, their input about how the students’ engagement in that context impacted their presence in the classrooms added an illuminating insight to the research. Throughout the research, the teachers shared with me what they noticed about the students’ engagement across contexts. I also
conducted interviews with the mothers of Mai, Ziad, and Yan. I conducted these interviews in out-of-school spaces (such as the family’s home and coffee shop). Listening to families provided insights about the focal students’ literary engagement. It also helped me gather more detailed information about the students and gain a deeper understanding of the students as learners. All interviews (see Appendix G) were audio-recorded and then transcribed. All family interviews were translated from Arabic to English, except for one interview conducted in English. After my interviews with the mothers, I continued communicating with them through WhatsApp, where we could ask questions and share details about the focal students.

**Read-Alouds**

The read-alouds focused on literature about the Middle East and occurred in three settings throughout the research study (9 in the ENL classroom, 12 in the grade-level classrooms, and 18 within the culturally sustaining context). Throughout this study, I shared multiple books with the ELA and ENL teachers; the annotated bibliography detailing each book is presented in Appendix A. Table 5 illustrates the children’s literature used for grade-level classroom, ENL classroom, and culturally sustaining context read-alouds. I eliminated five grade-level and ENL classroom observations of read-aloud of books about the Middle East from my data analysis because there was only one focal student (the others were absent or not available) and he did not engage (he listened and looked at the text) during these sessions. My field notes from these observations focused on how the teacher approached the read-alouds. Sometimes the teachers’ instructional practice was based on reading the book and helping the students comprehend it.
Table 5

Children’s Literature About the Middle East Used for Grade-Level Classroom, ENL Classroom, and Culturally Sustaining Context Read-Alouds

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade-Level Context</th>
<th>January – June 2018</th>
<th>September - December</th>
<th>January – April 2019</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Silent Music 3/14, 15</td>
<td>Mommy’s Khimar 12/12</td>
<td>Lost and Found cat 12/5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Big Red Lollipop 3/20</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deep in the Sahara 5/4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Night of the Moon 5/17</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One Green Apple 3/15</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Journey 4/25</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My First Ramadan 5/24</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Under the Ramadan Moon 5/25</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ENL Context</th>
<th>Silent Music 1/25</th>
<th>Big Red Lollipop 10/18</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Golden Dome and Silver Lanterns 3/1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One Green Apple 4/25, 4/26</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ramadan Moon 6/1, 13</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Culturally Sustaining Context</th>
<th>Silent Music 1/17</th>
<th>Nasreen Secret School 9/28, 10/4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Golden Dome and Silver Lanterns 1/12, 2/1</td>
<td>Salam Alaikum. A Message of Peace 10/24</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Big Red Lollipop 4/10</td>
<td>Mommy’s Khimar 10/30</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Librarian of Basra 5/22</td>
<td>Lost and Found cat 11/8, 14</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Golden Dome and Silver Lanterns 1/29</td>
<td>Deep in the Sahara 2/11</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Night of the Moon 3/7</td>
<td>Celebrate Ramadan and Eid Al-Fitr 1/18</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Throughout the spring of 2018, I observed in three grade-level classrooms and one ENL classroom. During the fall of 2018 and continuing until April 2019, I engaged with one grade-level classroom and one ENL classroom. I observed the classroom teachers reading literature about the Middle East in their classroom settings where all students were invited to engage in the book discussions. I observed each teacher’s read-aloud in the classroom once a week and for approximately thirty minutes. I took field notes on the focal students’ verbal and non-verbal responses as well as their teachers’ approach when reading literature about the Middle East. I did not record any data from other students in the grade-level classrooms. I sat on a chair behind the focal students with my notebook.

For the culturally sustaining context, I engaged in interactive read-aloud of children’s literature about the Middle East with the Arabic-speaking students during school hours. In this context, the focal students and I engaged in discussions with each other. I read one book a week (and every other week) to provide time for focal students’ multimodal responses. Within this context, students were encouraged to expand and build on their thoughts. Before, during, and after the reading, students shared their opinions with the group using their comfortable language(s) (Arabic and/or English). My role was to read aloud the texts and help the students make predictions and connections with the texts based on their background knowledge and experiences. My questions were open-ended, such as “what are your thoughts? what are your feelings? tell us more about that? and what makes you think of that?” I encouraged the students to elaborate and explore both connections and disconnections with the texts (Jones, Clarke, & Enriquez, 2010). To invite their critical responses, I asked questions like, what do you think of how the author sees the world? what things in life the author wants us to think about? what advice you want to give the author? What would you tell the author? who/what is missing in the
story? whose life/voice is ignored? and what possible changes you might make in the story/illustration? During another day, students continued discussing the book that they read earlier in the week (or the week before). I was curious to understand and listen to focal students’ experiences.

**Multimodal Response to Literature**

In Ms. Sofia’s (2nd grade teacher) classroom, students sometimes engaged in written reflection about the stories using a classroom prompt sheet. They wrote what they learned about the book (what the story was about, their favorite part, and why they liked the book). Students engaged in spontaneous reactions to the stories, such as demonstrating non-verbal reactions (facial expressions) and touching the book (point to the characters or/and specific details) throughout the research study.

Within the culturally sustaining context, the focal students responded to read-alouds through discussions, drawings, writings, and dramatizations. Artifacts were collected from the focal students who chose to write or/and draw using English or/and Arabic. I incorporated Short’s (2008) idea of “cultural x-ray” to invite the students to provide more in-depth perspectives of their values and beliefs, or what matters to them. Students crafted their artifacts using blank sheets or cultural x-rays. Since children are expressive by nature, drama is a flexible activity that encourages them to make meaning in various ways (Adomat, 2005). I tried to build a responsive community where the students could interact with each other and dramatize their literary responses.

To reinforce dramatic responses, I asked open-ended questions to invite the students to explore the feelings of the characters (e.g., how do the characters feel about specific actions in stories?) and encouraged them to imagine as if they were the characters in the stories (e.g., what
would you say/do/feel if you were the character?). The students were invited to tell their stories. For example, when they shared connections or/and disconnections, I invited their elaborations and explanations. The students also were invited to write or/and draw their thoughts about the books or/and their lives. I tried to confer with each student to help them expand and provide more explanation on their writings or/and drawings. Then, each student had the chance to share his/her work. All culturally sustaining context interactive read-alouds and verbal responses to literature were audio-recorded and then transcribed. I used my phone for recording and then stored the audio files on my laptop in a specific file folder.

**Transcriptions**

I transcribed all the audio-recordings verbatim weekly (or every other week) throughout the data collection. Before transcribing, I listened to the recordings a couple of times. As I transcribed line by line, I became more familiar with the data. According to Maxwell (2013), “listening to interview tapes prior to transcription is also an opportunity for analysis” (p. 105). As I listened to the recordings, I kept field notes of my thoughts, connections, and wonderings. Listening thoughtfully to the recordings was an opportunity for me to observe myself and critique my language and how it impacted focal students’ engagement. I kept jotting notes as I read throughout the transcripts and observational field notes (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984). Body language, gestures, or tones were placed in brackets.

After I transcribed the Arabic words and sentences, I translated them into English. The translations of Arabic into English were placed in parentheses. After I transcribed the family interviews that were conducted in Arabic, I translated them into English. Arabic and English languages are of different origins. Each one has its own vocabulary, grammar, sound, writing,
and style. As translations should preserve the original meaning, my job was not to add or expand but to translate the meaning from Arabic into English.

**Data Analysis**

I analyzed data collected across the fourteen months. It was essential for me to be organized and thorough with my data to make it convenient for me (and other interested investigators) to read and find specific information. The data analysis process was recursive and nonlinear. It started after I transcribed the first data piece (Creswell, 2013). I analyzed data right after I collected it, which helped me to identify inquiries and become a more focused listener and observer as I continued my data collection. The research questions were always in my mind as I read through the data (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014). As Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2014) suggest, if we do not “know what matters more, everything matters” (p. 73).

Once the data collection ended, it took approximately eight months to analyze all data sets. I continued to go back through my data sets and look for themes and patterns within each data and across all data sets.

Throughout the data collection and analysis, I kept questioning and reflecting on my data to be more specific and critical on what I see, hear, know, and feel. For example, I wondered what the texts made the focal students think of and what the students chose to share or write about. Being fully present in the moment means we are intellectually and physically aware of ourselves, our students, and the world. Schön (1987) refers to this act as reflection-in-action. We also need to be present when the moment is over, as we explore our data to see and reflect. Schön referred to this process as reflection-on-action. When reflecting, we have to slow down to see what is going on. We need to hold in mind the end-in-view (Dewey, 1938). Instead of rushing to a conclusion and final judgment, we must question what we know and do not know
and consider different resources and possibilities. Dewey refers to this act of balancing what we observe and understand as “perception” which is, as Rodgers (2010) defines it, “acting on thick evidence” (p. 49). When we genuinely perceive students, we can see everything connected to them and their past, present, and future experiences. To be present is close to compassion, which influences the feeling of curiosity. Curiosity is vital in the reflection process (Dewey, 1933). Therefore, practitioners need to be awake, alive, flexible, and interested in the students and the research. Curiosity can lead to listening and communicating with students to encourage them to ask questions that invite details. With open-mindedness, they could release their mind and empower their metacognitive ability to think critically about what they accept as truth.

I kept memoing throughout my data collection and analysis. Using the memoing strategy helped me stay focused on my thoughts and start writing my analysis (Shagoury & Power, 2012). Memoing can clarify, magnify, and generate ideas that may not “immediately jump out of the data” (Corbin & Strauss, 2015, p. 129). Having the writings in front of me brought some new insights to consider. As the poet Diane Glancy (1992) discussed, writing is like “seeing what is not seen in a different way than if we’d seen it” (p. 54) (as cited in Shagoury & Power, 2012, p. 201). Writing memos is like dialoguing with the data to come up with questions, ideas, and suggestions (Corbin & Strauss, 2015) to move my exploration forward. I used analytic memoing to document my impressions and what I see and hear in the focal students’ drawings and writings (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014). Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2014) suggest that the best way to analyze photographs or drawings is through memoing. I reflected on the focal students’ works through writing descriptively and avoiding judgmental and evaluative statements. As Bogdan and Biklen (1992) write, “rich data are filled with pieces of evidence, with clues that you begin to put together to make analytical sense out of what you study” (p. 86).
Since memos could capture my analytical thinking, I used a narrative strategy to capture detailed evidence of what I observed in my research in a story-like format. I depicted the data in the form of vignettes, which is defined as “vivid portrayal[s] of the conduct of an event of everyday life” (Erickson, 1986, p. 149). In the vignettes, I could synthesize multiple data sources to depict participants’ conceptions of specific events (Erickson, 2012). Through narrative vignettes, I portrayed holistic accounts of data pieces through describing what was there, not what was missing. As I read through my observational field notes, I looked for pieces that needed detailed evidence through narrations.

**Coding for Themes and Patterns**

I followed the constant comparative method to compare different pieces of data by asking analytical questions and validating concepts or categories as they emerge (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). Through the constant comparative method, I assembled data based on concepts, themes, and categories. I revisited the data sets numerous times throughout my data analysis period. My data analysis was not a linear process, but a back and forth movement.

I engaged in reading and rereading my data through open coding (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). I coded broadly to identify dimensions and to establish patterns and themes. I followed the descriptive coding method, where I assigned codes, words, and short descriptions to the data (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014) manually using Microsoft Word comments (Appendix I illustrates an example of my initial coding).

After I digitally transcribed each audio recording, I read each transcription and added my notes, thinking, and wonderings. As I read, I highlighted the participants’ critical comments. On the second reading on another day, I added notes to the documents. Next, I highlighted keywords and phrases within each of my notes. I read each of my data on different days because I wanted
to have a fresh eye each time I looked at my data. I used data sets from field notes and observations along with the transcribed recordings. I placed sticky notes with notes on the students’ drawings and writings. Then I highlighted within the critical comments.

In the initial coding, I described what was happening in the literary discussion. Here is a sampling of terms that were used in the first three transcripts: “question the story location”, “question the language of the text”, “question the title of the text”, “question the character’s act”, “question me”, “question each other”, “use illustrations to describe character”, “use illustrations to make meaning”, “use illustrations to predict”, “describe characters’ action”, “disagree with each other”, “personal connection”, “text-to-text connection”, “talk with each other”, “suggest alternatives”, “repeat language from text”, “translanguaging” and “speak Arabic.” Since I have multiple settings, I noticed some codes repeatedly occurred in the culturally sustaining context but not in the classroom settings, such as “translanguaging”, “pray”, “personal story”, “touch the book”, and “religious beliefs.” However, in the classroom settings, both concepts: “spoke to self” and “one word without elaboration,” repeatedly occurred throughout the read-alouds. I began to compare the terms for similar characteristics and group them (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). Through reviewing my initial codes, I began to obtain some analytic themes and patterns in the data. Some concepts were slowly emerging from open codings, such as, “translanguaging” which eventually became an important category.

Interactions, actions, and similar responses were grouped under one categorical term. I noticed that there were groupings of responses around specific categories. I grouped these responses and collapsed them into broader issue categories. For example, responses that students made about “text” included: text’s location, text’s language, text’s author, text’s title; “social” responses included: build on each other, argue with each other, talk with each other, question me
and each other, translate for each other, share specific details about language, culture and religion, and personal connections; “expressive” responses included: dramatize, voice acting, pray, touch the book, and facial expression.

After recognizing my themes and patterns during the process of categorization, I elaborated on my interpretations of my findings (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). I worked to find relationships between the categories and my research questions. As my research questions focus on participants’ engagement throughout multiple contexts, some themes became more specific based on the context. For example, “dramatization” was different in the culturally sustaining context than in the classroom settings; therefore, I described it with the words, “active” or “silent.” Active dramatization means when students moved around (stand, jump, change seat, moved hands). Silent dramatization refers to facial expressions and briefly showing non-verbal reactions to the books. I compared my emerging data across settings to look for similarities and differences. As Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2014) state, “focusing solely on individual actions without attending to their contexts runs the risk of misunderstanding the meaning of events” (p.167).

The transcript analysis, artifacts, observations, and interviews were used to triangulate the data. Data sources from families, teachers, and general observations were used to verify the categories created through analysis of participants’ engagement with literature. While working on analyzing my data (for Mai, Yan, and Ziad) and tracing through the data sets of read-alouds and discussions, I noticed each student had unique perspectives. Mai shared her thoughts on what was right and what was wrong. Once Yan saw the literature, he communicated with the authors and illustrators through his suggestions. Ziad frequently questioned his surroundings. I went back and forth into the data sets of responses to literature, drawn and written artifacts, and interviews.
to look for the connections and disconnections. Appendix F exemplifies alignment of data sources with research questions. Chapter six describes Mai, Yan, and Ziad’s interactions and engagement with literature across the multiple contexts throughout the study.

The Researcher’s Role(s)

I had several roles shifting from “observant participant” (Erickson, 1996) to participant-observer. While my role in the culturally sustaining context was an observant participant, my role in the ENL classroom and grade-level classroom contexts was a participant-observer which is distinct from the practitioner inquiry stance where teachers engage and learn with and from their students. As an observant participant, I actively read, listened, and was responsive to the participants during the culturally sustaining context. Being responsive to the students should not impact maintaining a balance between being sensitive and nonjudgmental (Josselson, 2013). I engaged as a teacher-researcher during the culturally sustaining context where I can observe and make brief field notes. At the same time, I participated in interacting with the students and inviting their participation. As I facilitated discussions with open-ended questions, I also engaged in the meaning-making with the students. However, during the grade-level and ENL classroom observations, I took field notes on the teachers’ and focal students’ engagement with literature.

How practitioners position themselves can influence the knowledge construction of their practices, participants, and settings. My positionality as a researcher, according to Herr and Anderson (2015), “means asking the question, who am I in relation to my participants and my setting?” (p. 37). I am racially an insider to the focal students I was researching, but as a researcher and someone who is not from the school, I was also an outsider. At the beginning of the study, the focal students saw me as an outsider. Gradually, as I spent time with them during the interactive read-alouds, they saw me as part of their community. I have insider information
about the students’ background and native language. Thus, my own lived experiences and identities as a teacher-researcher from Saudi Arabia shaped the knowledge I constructed in the settings. Given my knowledge about the Arab world in general and the representations and misrepresentations in children’s literature, in particular, I selected literature that fitted the students’ experiences. Having some shared cultural and linguistic backgrounds with the students promoted literary discussions in the study. Thus, during the culturally sustaining context, I tried to understand the participants’ culturally specific responses and help them build on that. However, there were responses I had partiality of knowledge to account for; thus, I was reflective of my knowledge and what I explored in the study. I believe navigating my identities as both a teacher and researcher allowed me to systematically and intentionally facilitate this inquiry. My focus was to study the students’ engagement with literature about the Middle East; therefore, both identities (teacher and researcher) and positions (insider and outsider) informed how I facilitated the explorations.

Validity and Trustworthiness

To ensure trustworthiness and dependability, Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2014) suggest that researchers specify their basic paradigm. Thus, this study is set within the constructivist (or interpretive) research paradigm (Guba, 1990) to frame its methodology section. There is a match between the paradigmatic assumptions and the methods of investigation of this study. In the constructivist paradigm, researchers provide a “thick description” (Geertz, 1973) of the research. They need to be clear in explaining what they see and hear in the research setting. Providing a detailed and thick description is a pivotal validation strategy (Creswell, 2013) that highlights the description as opposed to evaluation. Certainly, describing what I see (not what I feel or think) as I see it without adding my feelings and emotions can help me notice what is
there. As Carini (2001) remarks, “describing makes room for something to be fully present” (p. 163).

I used multiple strategies to shape my practices throughout the data collection, analysis, and writing phases for conceptualizing validity and trustworthiness. This inquiry employed data triangulation (Patton, 2015) to enhance the trustworthiness of my data analysis. As Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2014) argue, the validity is enhanced when our findings “are confirmed by more than one data collection” (p. 307). Moreover, the length of the study and the multiple contexts in which data were collected enhance the dependability of the study.

To refine ideas in the study, I discussed ideas in the data with others; and this is what Creswell (2013) refers to as “peer review or debriefing.” Through debriefing, I listened to people’s thoughts that might help me to consider new perspectives and think about some aspects differently. Sharing with others helped me see my participants “in a new light” and to “gain distance from my own automatic response, my assumptions” (Ballenger, 2009, p. 80).

Throughout the data collection and analysis process, I wrote proposals and presented at conferences such as the Ethnography in Education Research Forum. Participating in conferences allowed me to be thoughtful about how I present my data. This experience supported me as I received input and thought-provoking questions from peers, which led me deeper into my data and helped me think in different ways. Moreover, member checking (Creswell, 2013) is an illuminating strategy I used to clarify and add to my data. For example, I shared pieces of data with the focal students and their mothers (e.g., read-alouds and artifacts) and asked them about their thoughts and if there was anything they wanted to add, clarify, or/and change.

A common concern with practitioner-researcher is that teacher coercion might complicate the research (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009). Therefore, throughout my research study, I tried to
remained open to changes and possibilities and to let my participants guide the direction of the research. Although I felt the pressure that I did not have enough time with the focal students given their schedule, I remained calm as I enjoyed having fun with them. Sometimes they wanted to continue talking about things in texts we read before instead of reading new books, holding the books and looking at the illustrations instead of engaging in writing or drawing, or sharing about the books with people (teachers and students) they knew who were passing by the hallway. Having strict rules could impact how they feel and engage with the literature. Thus, it is not necessary for practitioners to strictly follow what they have already planned. As Ballenger (2009) remarks, “we must challenge ourselves to see beyond what we assume, beyond what we see at first” (p. 105). Therefore, I revisited my plans and questions because the research settings and participants opened doors to new directions and perspectives.

Whereas teacher-researchers might draw heavily on their own identities (Campano, 2007), their background could impact their views about their students. Therefore, by “making the familiar strange” (Erickson, 1984), I could look at my data with a fresh and new lens. Throughout the data collection and analysis, I paid close attention to what is “governing my gazes.” Thus, I kept visiting how my “governing gazes” impacted how I saw, judged, and observed my participants (Emig, 1982). Naming and thinking about my multiple identities and experiences shaped what I looked for, understood, saw, expected, and did not expect. Indeed, subjectivity is central to qualitative research of this nature.

Anonymity and confidentiality were assured. All individuals in the study were given pseudonyms in the data collection process. Documents that link the pseudonyms to individuals' identifying information were stored on password-protected computers and destroyed after the
completion of data analysis. All materials that could be linked to individuals were destroyed after the completion of this study.

In the coming three chapters, I present my findings. I report the findings of this study that emerged from the data associated with the guiding research questions. Chapter 4 explores the Arabic-speaking students’ engagement across the read-alouds in both grade-level and ENL classrooms. Chapter 5 presents the Arabic-speaking students’ engagement in the culturally sustaining context. In-depth portraits of three students in the study are presented in chapter 6 to answer both research questions. Although the three students make meaning together, I chose to include a portrait for each one individually because, as I read and reread my data, I noticed each one offers a unique perspective. I referred to the participant students with multiple names throughout the research study: focal students and Arabic-speaking students.
Chapter 4

The Read-Aloud in Classrooms (Grade-Level and ENL)

_Those books allow them to feel like welcome in the class..., like connection... I think it makes them more comfortable..., like more of a community..._

Ms. Sofia, 2nd grade teacher

This chapter explores how Arabic-speaking students engaged with literature about the Middle East in their grade-level and ENL classrooms. Their responses to literature-based read-aloud and discussions provide evidence of their engagement, and therefore bring insights to my first research question: What is the nature of Arabic-speaking students’ engagement with children’s literature about the Middle East in the grade-level and ENL classrooms? This chapter presents findings that provide evidence for the focal students’ literary engagement in their grade-level and ENL classrooms. While brief, their responses indicate their engagement. Their engagement shows the power of literature about the Middle East in enhancing the Arabic-speaking students’ identity and positioning them as cultural resources in their classrooms. I then illustrate how the read-aloud was a means for cultural understanding.

The focal students in this chapter—May, Yan, Ziad, Moh, Moya, and Omar—were at levels of English proficiency. They shared much in common, including topics of interest they liked to write about, connections they made to literature, and a sense of belonging when seeing literature that connected to their cultures and daily lives. During the first semester, I focused on getting to know the six students’ perspectives on learning and their engagement with literature throughout multiple settings. I then continued with Mai, Yan, and Ziad.
Literature Can Influence Students’ Identity

Identity is something connected to the person’s inside and the outside world. The sociocultural and psychological factors impact how students construct their identities. Therefore, positioning students as knowers and leaders is crucial in forming a positive identity about themselves.

Student-Teacher Discussions Around Cultural Issues

Using literature about the Middle East had the potential to enhance the focal students’ in-school experiences as they sustained their cultural practices while interacting with the dominant society (Paris, 2012). Sometimes when teachers put the focal students on the spot, the students shared brief responses or did not share anything at all; however, when building on what they said through student-centered discussion, they tended to share more about their lives. After Moh shared that he saw a camel in Jordan, in response to Deep in the Sahara (Cunnane, 2013), Ms. Olivia asked him whether he wanted to visit his country:

Moh: No

Ms. Olivia: Why not?

Moh: I don’t like it there because they are killing people.

Ms. Olivia: Oh, because it is dangerous. Maybe someday it will not be dangerous.

(Field Notes, 1st grade classroom, May 4, 2018)

Although some teachers find it challenging to discuss sensitive issues and emphasizing critical discussions (Lazar & Offenbeg, 2011), Ms. Olivia, in this excerpt, handled the students’ sensitive comments with openness. She engaged in discussion with him as she tried to help him expand on his comment. According to her, ‘Moh never share something personal before…That is great!’ Ms. Olivia noticed the effect of books about the Middle East on Moh’s responses.
During the whole group conversation in the classroom, Ms. Olivia sometimes focused on inviting the Arabic-speaking students more fully into the discussion. Whenever they shared about their lives, Ms. Olivia asked questions to help the students elaborate and share specific details. In a discussion of *Night of the Moon* (Khan, 2008), Yan shared personal details about his life during Ramadan:

Yan: I have a rainbow light to celebrate Ramadan.

Ms. Olivia: What do you do with it? Does it go in your bedroom or in your house?

Yan: It just goes on the table.

Ms. Olivia: And you turn it on every day?

Yan: Yes.

Ms. Olivia: Is it just for Ramadan?

Yan: Yes.

Ms. Olivia: What’s your daddy say about it?

Yan: That is cool…

(Transcription, 1st grade classroom, May 17, 2018)

When Yan shared he had a rainbow light to celebrate Ramadan, Ms. Olivia wanted to know more about this light through questions that explored when and where Yan’s family used such light. Although some of her questions were closed-ended such as “is it just for Ramadan?” most were open-ended. Ms. Olivia’s questions reveal her curiosity. Her curiosity motivated her to wonder and question. She was curious about her students’ out-of-school experiences, and that shows how she appreciated and valued them. Later in the discussion, Yan also initiated that “people come to my house during Ramadan.” Yan received an empowering message that supported his ownership and led him to continue to share about his life. Yan was positioned as the expert and Ms. Olivia
as a learner (Osorio, 2018). Therefore, when the teacher became interested in her students’ out-of-school lives, she sent a message to her students that their background matters. In this example, Ms. Olivia remained curious and open to learning and understanding her learners, and moved beyond the text.

Students Share Their Experiences During Ramadan. The children’s literature about the Middle East invited discussions about the focal students’ native cultures prompting students to share some specific details about their lives. For example, in response to *My First Ramadan* (Katz, 2007), Moh shared a story about his brother, “my brother was not fasting when he goes to another school…because he was playing with his friends, and they got tired and went inside, and the children see them.” Moh tried to explain the children saw his older brother drinking water during the day of Ramadan while he was supposed to be fasting (*Field Notes*, 1st grade classroom, May 24, 2018). The focal students transferred the religious and cultural practices from home to school. Although fasting is not obligatory for children until they reach adolescence, some of the focal students practiced fasting the whole day or half-day during Ramadan. Some did not join their friends during lunchtime, especially those with older siblings such as Moya, Ziad, Omar, and Moh. According to Ms. Nancy:

> They all wanna come in and fast for a couple of days, and then they kind of they don’t wanna do it anymore… some of them fasted longer than others. Some of them didn’t even wanna go to the cafeteria so we would keep them up here. But they all wanna fast. It has mostly been a really big deal at home, obviously, so they wanted to carry on. They were proud to do it here… (*Field Notes, Interview*, April 1, 2019)

As the students practiced fasting during Ramadan and shared their specific cultural practices, their teachers knew more about them and accommodated their needs. For example, students who
practiced fasting did not need to go to the cafeteria during lunchtime; they could stay in their classrooms. The students’ sharing of themselves showed their comfort level and how they saw their school as a connection to their homes. When the students noticed that it was honored by the teachers to transfer their home practices to school, they became open to sharing details about their religious practices and backgrounds.

The following excerpt presents the focal students’ engagement in the ENL classroom during a discussion of *Ramadan Moon* (Robert, 2009). Ms. Nancy was trying to explore her Arabic-speaking students’ cultural practices during the month of Ramadan.

Ziad: The moon is a paper!

Ms. Nancy: Why you say that?

Ziad: They look like a paper.

…

Ms. Nancy: [Reading]… So where do you go during Ramadan?

Moh: Mosque.

Ziad: الجامع (Mosque)

Ms. Nancy: Do you go, Ziad?

Mai: I go.

Ziad: No.

Ms. Nancy: You used to go, right?

Ziad: Sometimes.

Ms. Nancy: You go sometimes. Anybody else, Yan, do you go to the mosque?

Yan: No.

Mai: I pray at home.
Moh: I go after homework.

Ms. Nancy: You go after homework; I like hearing that. [Reading]…. So a lot of you are doing this right, you eating before the sun comes up, before the sun is up in the sky, when still dark, you are eating…

Ziad: The baby can’t pray (laughter).

Ms. Nancy: Does the baby make you laugh? The baby is trying to pray. Mai, does your baby pray?

Mai: No, when the moon goes out me and my mom is going a little bit to the mmm to that say *Allah Akbar* الله أكبر.

Ms. Nancy: Before you pray?

Mai: No.

Ms. Nancy: No, say it again.

Mai: We eat, we wait a little bit, we eat first, then we pray.

Ms. Nancy: You eat first, and then you pray; I think that what they did in the story too …

Ms. Nancy: Oh, what happened to the moon?

Students: It’s full…

Ziad: It’s broken!

*(Transcription, ENL classroom, June 1, 2018)*

As Ms. Nancy wanted to help the focal students connect with the story, some responded with one word, and others provided brief details. Mai made a personal connection with the story by providing information about how her family breaks their fast at the time of the call to the evening prayer at sunset. Mai explained going with her mother to the mosque during Ramadan, saying,
“when the moon goes out, me and my mom is going a little bit to the, mmm, to that say, *Allah Akbar.*” Instead of saying mosque or masjid, she said, *Allah Akbar,* which is a phrase used by Muslims in prayers, meaning, Allah is great. Mai provided a detailed perspective as she responded to her teachers’ questions. Mai perhaps forgot how to say mosque or masjid; therefore, she shared a well-known practice Muslims usually engage in when praying, saying *Allah Akbar* before each movement.

**Students’ Analysis of Illustrations**

The students wondered and made comments about the illustrations throughout the research study. In the read-alouds, the literature illustrations enhanced the students’ engagement (Martínez-Roldán, 2000). In the previous excerpt, Ziad engaged in analyzing the authenticity of the illustration in the text. His exclamations, “the moon is a paper,” noted the illustration depicted the moon as a crunchy white paper. Ziad’s comment reflected his argument about the realism of the picture as if he was saying, this is not a real moon. He continued his argument by saying, “they look like a paper” and “it’s broken!” Ziad tried to make meaning of the story by analyzing the illustrations (Sipe, 2008). He was particularly intrigued by the details in the illustrations in texts. Thus, he considered all the features in the text as meaningful. The next chapter provides more examples of how Ziad engaged in illustration analysis in the culturally sustaining context.

However, sometimes the illustrations also helped the focal students state their points. In the grade-level classrooms, Mai and Moh went close to the book to point to the illustration as they briefly shared comments during the read-aloud of *Big Red Lollipop* (Khan, 2010), *Deep in the Sahara* (Cunnane, 2013), *Lost and Found Cat* (Kuntz & Shrodes, 2017), and *Mommy’s Khimar* (Thompkins-Bigelow, 2018). Many times, these illustration-related comments were self-
initiated. During the discussion of *Deep in the Sahara*, Moh stood and moved closer to the text to point to the illustration depicting a group of women carrying objects on their head, and ask, “how she carry something like this?” (*Field Notes*, 1st grade classroom, May 4, 2018). Ms. Olivia, the 1st-grade teacher, invited the students to make connections and ask questions as she explored her Arabic-speaking students’ responses to them.

**Silent Dramatization**

The focal students were engaged in silent dramatization when responding to literature throughout the study. Silent dramatization means when students express the characters’ feelings through facial expressions, moving hands, or an exclamation, such as, “What?!?” and “No!” I called them “silent” because they were brief and often went unnoticed by others. They also were spontaneous. I see them as similar to Sipe’s (2000) transparent response, “the spontaneous immediacy of response, coupled with the low tone of voice in which they were spoken, seemed to indicate an engagement in the world of the story” (p. 267). The students lived through the experiences of the characters with themselves (Rosenblatt, 1978, 1995). The texts, according to Sipe (1996), “seemed to function as a platform” (p. 162) for the focal students’ imaginations. For example, in response to *Silent Music* (Rumford, 2009), Omar was moving his right hand like writing from right to left on the air, without saying a word (*Field Notes*, ENL classroom, January 25, 2018). He was intrigued by the Arabic writings in the text; all the time, staring at the text and sometimes smiling. Omar did not share with the classroom what he was doing, nor did Ms. Nancy notice his smiles.

Like pointing to the illustrations, silent dramatization helped the focal students share their response, especially when they forgot how to say specific words. For example, when Ms. Mari, the 1st grade teacher, asked about what the characters in *Under the Ramadan Moon* (Whiteman,
2008) were doing, Mai briefly demonstrated praying by using her hands. As she responded, “they are reading a book about when you do that,” she raised both clasped hands to her shoulder. The illustration is depicting a family sitting around a circular table and reading the Quran. Although praying was not depicted in the text, illustrations, or discussion, Mai chose to elaborate beyond what she saw and heard. She used both hands, without moving her body, to briefly show how to start praying. When Mai forgot how to say the word, pray, she acted out the word to help her finish her sentence, although classroom members did not notice her action (*Field Notes*, 1st grade classroom, May 25, 2018). Mai’s act is similar to how she responded in the ENL classroom when she shared “Allah Akbar” in lieu of the word, masjid, or mosque. In her grade-level classroom, however, Mai chose to act out the word to assist in demonstrating her point. Mai also said, “a book” instead of the Quran. Thus, instead of merely saying the characters are reading the Quran, Mai chose to provide a detailed perspective through sharing about praying as well. Later in the discussion, when Mai saw an illustration depicting people praying, she spontaneously said, “we do like that…” Mai used the illustration to make a connection and explain her earlier silent dramatization about praying.

*Talk to Self*

As Mai engaged in silent dramatization in the previous read-aloud discussion, she also shared responses with a low voice, “we go like there at the night…we do it in the home.” Ziad also shared, “my dad said that he gonna take me to the mosque.” While Ms. Mari was reading the story, Mai and Ziad spontaneously shared their connections. They shared their cultural practices during Ramadan and how, when, and where they pray. Mai and Ziad continued their discussion about practicing praying during Ramadan. They transacted with the text to make meaning (*Rosenblatt, 1978*) and share their life experiences.
The focal students talked to themselves when responding to literature that mirrors their lives, especially if it included Arabic words. They repeated the Arabic words to themselves. Sometimes, they spoke to themselves when responding to their teachers. The following example indicates Ziad’s engagement with *Silent Music* (Rumford, 2009) in the ENL classroom.

Ms. Nancy: [Reading]…

Dave: What Baghdad?

Ms. Nancy: Let me see if I can find it for you (used the earth globe to show location).

Ziad: ﻋﻨﺪ العراق (Close to Iraq).

Ms. Nancy: Look how far Baghdad is all the way here. Can I walk to get there?

All students: No!

Ms. Nancy: How shall I get to Baghdad?...

When one student asked about Baghdad, Ms. Nancy used the earth globe to show Baghdad’s location. Ziad was speaking in Arabic with a very low voice, “ﻋﻨﺪ العراق close to Iraq.” No one in the class paid attention to what he said, however. Although the students were engaged and comfortable using their language, they did not share their own life stories with their classmates. Later in the read-aloud, the students used low voices to express the character’s feelings, like in the following excerpt:

Ms. Nancy: What do you think he is doing?

Moya: Writing.

Ms. Nancy: He is writing. He is trying to do something peaceful? Because what is happening in his world right now?

Moya: Fighting.

All students: Sad.

Ms. Nancy: I would be sad and scared

Omar: Angry… he is angry.

Ms. Nancy: [Reading]…

(Transcription, ENL classroom, January 25, 2018)

Similar to Ziad, Omar spoke to himself while no one in the class heard what he said. Omar entered the world of the story by expressing the characters’ feelings (Sipe, 2008). While everyone in the class thought that the character was feeling sad, Omar believed that he was angry. Ziad and Omar were engaged with the story, but quietly. They did not elaborate on their responses. They responded directly to the teacher’s inquiry, but their answers were not taken up or heard by the class members.

Although they extended beyond what is in the book by providing specific details about their language and culture, the focal students often did not engage in a dialogic conversation and share their life experiences. They sometimes did not publicly communicate their responses or make them heard. However, they were engaged with the literature regardless of the instructional practice. Their engagement was sometimes silent through listening, smiling, and looking at the book.

Students as Resources

As it is important to consider how students negotiate their identity and agency, this study sheds light on the experience of positioning students as resources. When the focal students saw books that reflected their world read in their classrooms, they helped their teachers pronounce
Arabic words correctly, and became the translator for the book and each other, providing details beyond what was in the book. The development of agency and identity is related to sociocultural practices and activities (Holland et al., 1998). Loh (2009) argues that “multicultural literary narratives can be seen to provide spaces for identity play, for imagining particular visions of self in relation to the world, whether one that is marked by race and ethnicity or gender or social class” (p. 292).

When the classroom teachers positioned the focal students as experts, the students provided linguistic and cultural knowledge to their classrooms (May, 2011; Maloch & Beutel, 2010). For example, during the read-aloud of Silent Music (Rumford, 2009), Ms. Lucy (the 2nd grade teacher) invited Omar and Moya without directly pointing to them. As she said, “there are some words in here that are very hard for me that I might ask some of my friends to help me because they are not English words” (Field Notes, March 14, 2018). Ms. Lucy encouraged the Arabic-speaking students to view themselves as producers of knowledge, and that gave them the opportunity to show their mastery of the text. Omar and Moya provided the accurate pronunciation of Arabic words in the text. They joined the teacher as she read the Arabic words, “Yasmin, Mustafa, Yakut, Salam, and Harb.” They also repeated the words to themselves.

Notably, the children’s literature about the Middle East offered the Arabic-speaking students an opportunity to focus on what they knew and could do. Instead of focusing on being labelled as “English Language Learner” or “Limited English Proficient,” they felt empowered as experts and resources for their teachers and classmates (Martínez-Roldán, 2000).

**Students as Translators**

The children’s literature about the Middle East did not only invite into the classroom the focal students’ native cultures, but also their native language. Throughout the study, I noticed the
focal students sometimes translated for each other. When one focal student shared an Arabic word, another focal student often provided the English translation of that word so the teacher and the English-speaking students could understand what they were talking about. They also translated for their teacher. When Ms. Lucy said the word, Salam, Moya mentioned the word, hello. Although Salam means peace, Arabic-speaking people use Salam to greet each other, saying Al-Salam Alaikum, which means peace to be with you. Sometimes they provided Arabic synonyms and explanations to the words. The word, Salam reminded Omar of another word, شلونك (how are you?). The focal students extended beyond the book and provided more details about their language. They positioned themselves as the teacher for their language. During turn and talk, Omar also shared Arabic numbers with his classmate. He was teaching his English-speaking classmate how to say the Arabic numbers. Although Arabic numbers were not mentioned or illustrated in the text or the classroom discussion, Omar’s elaboration reflects how his native language was a means for positive identity-forming (Martínez-Roldán, 2003).

**Read-Aloud for Building Cultural Understanding**

Using literature about the Middle East invited cultural understanding. According to Ms. Nancy, “these books helped me learn about them (the Arabic-speaking students).” The book was considered a bridge that connected different cultures. While it was a mirror for the Arabic-speaking students, it was also a window for the teachers and the English-speaking students (Bishop, 1990). The more the students shared their lives, the more their teachers knew and explored about their worlds and experiences. Reading such literature inspired Ms. Olivia to better understand the Arabic-speaking students in her classroom. For example, she searched the web for different names for the hijab and followed up with parents.
Reading literature about the Middle East helped Ms. Nancy explore not only the Arabic-speaking students but also the French-speaking students in her classroom. In the following discussion held during a discussion of *Ramadan Moon* (Robert, 2009), Stella, a French-speaking girl, connected to the text and shared:

Ms. Nancy: [Reading]… Imam, what is Imam?

Omar: Imam.

Stella: It means a boy who does the pray for all.

Ms. Nancy: So, you do know! I’m sorry! Very good, but you are not Muslim.

Stella: I’m Muslim.

Omar: *Muslima* (مﺴﻠﻤﺔ) (a female Muslim).

Ms. Nancy: You are Muslim!!! I’m sorry I don’t know that, I thought you are not Muslim, you go to the mosque?...

Stella: Yeah.

Ms. Nancy: Oh, my goodness! I have no idea! I’m gonna write that down in your folder… so I’m Catholic, I go to Church, some people are Jewish… some people are Muslim, [and] they go to a mosque to pray. [Reading]…

(*Transcription*, ENL classroom, June 13, 2018)

When Ms. Nancy asked about the word *Imam*, which means a person, usually a male, who leads prayers in a mosque, Stella provided an accurate definition of the word. Since Imam is an Arabic word, Ms. Nancy expected the Arabic-speaking students to define it and was surprised to find out about Stella being a Muslim. This conversation reflects the wealth in students’ responses. When Ms. Nancy paused and listened to her students, she learned something new about them.
Reading literature about the Middle East with the Arabic-speaking students influenced their lives in the school. The teachers in the study noticed the Arabic-speaking students’ presence and engagement in their classroom when reading literature about the Middle East. Ms. Olivia and Ms. Lucy mentioned that the focal students were usually very quiet when reading books in general. The teachers also noticed how literature about the Middle East created a more welcoming community when students began to open-up about their own lives. According to Ms. Sofia:

I think that is really important [because] those books allow them to feel like welcome in the class…, like connection… I think it makes them more comfortable…., like more of a community when we are touching on…., their home life and things with them… I think that you bringing those stories is kind of like opened me up a little bit to try to grab more stories that connect, so I think it is really good for these children…, to have the connection with you, to be able to work with you as well as bring it back to the classroom because its kind to bring it to life for them… (Field Notes, Interview, February 5, 2019)

Reading books that mirror the students’ lives was an empowering act. The teachers noticed the students’ willingness and engagement with such books. The books supported the bridging of school and curriculum to their lives. They helped the students feel included in the school environment.

The literature about the Middle East influenced the teachers’ instructions and helped them connect with their students. During Christmas time, each student in the class engaged in writing a letter for their parents. Ms. Sofia wrote on the board, “Dear…., Merry Christmas, Happy Holiday, and Happy Eid” then said, “if you don’t celebrate Christmas, it’s ok you don’t need to say merry Christmas…” (Field Notes, 2nd grade classroom, December 20, 2018). Ms.
Sofia’s act indicates how teachers could celebrate differences in their classrooms. Ms. Sofia also noticed how her students were interested to know about each other’s cultural and religious practices. As she said:

They really want to know and even like holidays and stuff. When they miss a day for a holiday and come back, they like to ask questions like, what did you do…, they want to know about each other… (Interview, February 5, 2019)

In a similar vein, when Ms. Nancy previously said, “I’m Catholic, I go to Church, some people are Jewish… some people are Muslim,…” (Transcription, ENL classroom, June 13, 2018) she sent the message of acceptance for diversity. The teachers’ conversation contributed to promoting interreligious and intercultural dialogue, while fostering social inclusion and building bridges through knowledge and dialogue.

The research study demonstrated that not only the students, but also their families appreciated when teachers wanted to learn about them. According to Ziad’s mother:

المدرسة ترحب فيها، دائماً أبوابهم مفتوحة. مره شعرت بسعادة كثيرة لرؤية معلمة اللغة الإنجليزية تحاول تحكي معى باللغة العربية. قالت السلام عليكم! واضح انها كانت تحاول تتعلم اللغة العربية.

(Translation, Interview, March 5, 2019)

The school is welcoming us; they always open their door. One day, I felt so happy to see the English teacher trying to talk Arabic with me. She said, Al-Salam Alaikum (peace be with you). She was trying to learn Arabic! … (Translation, Interview, March 5, 2019)

Including the students’ culture and language through literature and discussion promoted a welcoming atmosphere, which contributed to a more open and diverse society. Some families were willing to collaborate in establishing such an environment. For example, Mai’s mother proposed the idea of introducing Eid to the school by arranging an event at the school or a public
park. As she said, (Transcription), “how about we arrange a party …and invite friends and the school, and we can bring our foods and share our culture?” (Translation, Interview, January 26, 2019). When Mai’s mother saw the literature about the Middle East and noticed how the school was welcoming their culture, she became more intrigued to propose such an idea. Just like the Arabic-speaking students, when families saw the literature that mirrored their lives, they wanted to add to it and share more about their ethnic backgrounds.

In this chapter, I presented how the focal students engaged with literature about the Middle East in their grade-level and ENL classrooms. The presence of such literature influenced their identity as they became resources of their language and culture. Sharing about their lives, fasting during Ramadan, and wearing hijab indicated how they saw the school as a comfortable space. Nevertheless, sometimes their engagement with literature was silent during their responses to the classroom read-aloud. In the next chapter, I explore the Arabic-speaking students’ engagement in the culturally sustaining context.
Chapter 5

The Read-Aloud in the Culturally Sustaining Context

They talk Arabic or English?

Ziad, The Librarian of Basra (Winter, 2005)

This chapter explores the Arabic-speaking students’ engagement with literature about the Middle East in the culturally sustaining context that I co-created with the students. It presents a detailed description of the emerging themes of the data in response to my second research question: How do Arabic-speaking students respond when I read children’s literature about the Middle East in the culturally sustaining context? This chapter illustrates how interactive read-alouds within this context cultivated the focal students’ identity, critical consciousness, and cultural and linguistic pluralism. The culturally sustaining context was student-centered and designed to create opportunities for students to respond freely to texts across multiple modalities. The students had the freedom to question the text and to set the stage with dramatizations and translanguaging. Figure 2 illustrates the flow of read-aloud discussion in the context. It shows how the students (S) interacted with each other and their teacher (T).

Figure 2

Read-Aloud Discussion in the Culturally Sustaining Context
Read-Aloud to Support Students’ Identity

The read-aloud in the culturally sustaining context supported and sustained the Arabic-speaking students’ language and culture repertories (Paris, 2012) as they engaged in translanguaging when responding to literature that mirrored their worlds. The students talked and moved their chairs to get close to the book to touch it and point to the illustrations as they spoke. Sometimes they held the book and flipped the pages back as they connected with the illustrations. I focused on welcoming their thoughts and encouraging them to freely express themselves through talking, questioning, dramatizing, and/or writing because I believe each one had something valuable to say (Campano, 2007; Ballenger, 2009). I positioned myself as someone who wanted to explore with them and was interested in what they had to say and think. They were free to talk with each other and build upon each other’s comments, drawing on their linguistic repertoires (García, 2009) and funds of knowledge (González, Moll, & Amanti, 2005).

Active Dramatization

The Arabic-speaking students showed their excited reactions to the stories I read by actively dramatizing their responses. Their engagement showed how the story setting impacted their feelings of ownership. They took ownership by placing themselves in the world of the story through their dramatization. When reading Deep in the Sahara (Cunnane, 2013), Mai engaged in an interesting conversation when she saw the illustration of a woman praying:

Amal: Yeah, [reading]…

Mai: هاذي تصل؟ (Is she praying?)

Amal: Mmm… What do you think?

Mai: She is praying like this (gets up and performs praying) …

(Transcription, February 11, 2019)
Mai started the discussion by asking about the character’s actions. Since I wanted her to lead the discussion, I asked her to share her thoughts. She confidently and spontaneously performed praying in the hallway while enacting her meaning-making (Adomat, 2010). She entered the story’s world and practiced praying with the characters through standing, bowing, prostrating, and sitting on the floor. The book was not the only resource for Mai, as she wanted to provide more details about how praying should be performed using her background knowledge. When Mai performed praying in the classroom context, she only moved her hands without moving her body; and her movement was quick and unnoticeable. In the culturally sustaining context, Mai ruled the floor through her active movement as she confidently shared her knowledge through her expressive creativity. The text was the platform for her as she acted out what she would do if she were a story character (Sipe, 2008).

The focal students acted out the character’s feelings to make sense of the story, expressing the character’s reactions and emotions of happiness, sadness, fear, surprise, and anger. For example, when they saw the character in Mommy’s Khimar (Thompkins-Bigelow, 2018) was playing, Mai, Ziad, and Yan entered the world of the story and moved around and jumped, acting as a superhero and a bird, as if they were playing and having fun with the character (Rosenblatt, 1978; Sipe, 2008; Adomat 2012). As they moved around, they talked to each other. The following excerpt illustrates their engagement:

Yan: She is everything, she is a bird, she is a sun, she is…
Ziad: A superhero! (gets up and starts turning around).
Mai: A superhero (gets up and starts turning around).
Yan: I can be a hero (gets up and starts turning around).
Ziad: Like that (acts-out).
Yan: Look I am a bird (acts-out).

Mai: You can be a bird, I can be a bird… (acts-out).

(Field Notes, Transcription, October 30, 2018)

Mai, Yan, and Ziad controlled the text with their playfulness. They all got up from their chair and began twirling around and saying, “I can be a hero” and “I am a bird.” Their imitation of a superhero was based on Thompkins-Bigelow’s (2018) depiction of a young girl playing with her mother’s scarfs and acting as “a superhero in a cape, dashing from room to room” and jumping into the air.

The following excerpt illustrates how the focal students helped each other make meaning as they entered the world of the story and engaged in a discussion of Lost and Found Cat (Kuntz & Shrodes, 2017).

Amal: [Reading]…

Ziad: The cat (points to the illustration) meow, meow (acts-out).

Mai: (Laughter).

Yan: The cat left! (points to the illustration) …They are looking at the window…

Amal: Why?

Ziad: Because they are seeing others or if somebody steals… (gets up and starts moving around).

Mai: Because there are some people [who] can come inside your house…

Amal: Why?

Mai: Because they are looking at the window…

Amal: [Reading]…

Yan: They are leaving!
Amal: Yeah, what do you think about that?

Mai: Oh, where is the cat?...

Ziad: Oh, where is the cat?

Amal: Well, let’s find out [continue reading] …

Mai: They are crying and sad (acts-out sad emotion).

Amal: Why?

Mai: Because their faces are sad…

Ziad: I know where is the cat, they are putting it inside this (points to illustration) they are doing this so it doesn’t go inside the water (gets up and starts turning around using both hands).

Yan: It is a big boat!

Amal: I think there are a lot of people in that boat.

Mai: Yes! And they are coming out… Oh! Wait wait wait, she is doing this and she is looking up (act-out using hands) …

Yan: Is she yelling?

Ziad: Like this, AHHH … (acts-out).

(Transcription, November 8, 2018)

The students imagined themselves in the story platform with the characters who lost their cat and tried to find it. They shared their predictions, exclamations, and questions as they made sense of the text. Ziad was aesthetically expressive as he shared his thinking while moving around. When Ziad sometimes moved around as he responded to literature during the read-alouds, my initial thought about some of his responses was off-task behavior. For example, after I asked about their thoughts when they realized the cat left, in the previous excerpt, Ziad got up and walked into the
hallway. I could not hear what he said at the time of the data collection. As I engaged in listening to the recording, transcribing, and analyzing, I came to understand Ziad’s action as a dramatization response. The way he talked and moved around might have been interpreted as being the clown of the group because he was funny, but he was deeply engaged in a powerful action and discussion of predicting the characters’ acts and feelings.

**Voice Acting.** Ziad added an interesting presence to the read-alouds not only through moving around and having a sense of humor, but also through creating characters’ voices. In the previous conversation, Ziad mimicked a cat’s sound, “meow,” as he tried to express the cat’s reaction in the text. In another example, Ziad created the voice of the character in *Nasreen’s Secret School* (Winter, 2009) to illustrate the emotion of the character when soldiers took her son. As he said, “oh! They say please don’t, please…” (*Field Notes, Transcription*, September 28, 2018), he put his hands on his head and then moved them to show disapproval. The illustration (and the text) did not show details about the character’s reactions and feelings. It only depicted the character standing by the door and watching her son while her face looked sad. Therefore, Ziad worked on making her feelings to be more expressive. Ziad engaged in voice acting as he performed voices to represent a character’s reaction to provide more information. The dialogue he created was impacted by his understanding of how a character might act and talk in a specific situation. Therefore, his knowledge and personal experiences impacted what and how he performed (Adomat, 2012).

Dramatization provided a way for focal students to show how the characters reacted in specific situations in the story through praying, laughing, jumping, exclaiming, whispering, and showing sad emotions. The students used dramatization as a space where they could step into the shoes of a variety of characters and take control of a situation or action. As in the previous
example, Ziad stepped into the character’s shoes and defended her by talking back to the soldiers. Therefore, he expressed his empathy toward the character through deeply understanding her emotions and standing up for her. Through empathy, he connected with how the characters felt.

**Critical Consciousness**

Although the culturally sustaining context was an empowering space where students could think and engage freely with literature, it was also a space where they engaged in naming their reality. They did this through questioning the text and the world (Freire, 2000). The focal students questioned their surroundings.

**Questioning the Text.** At first, the focal students seemed surprised to see books about themselves. Omar, Ziad, Mai, and Moya repeatedly exclaimed, “is this Arabic?” and “I know Arabic, I can speak!” They also asked me to read in Arabic several times, “can you read the story in Arabic?” Sometimes during the read-aloud, they questioned how they read English books and used the Arabic language to respond to these books; as they said, “we speak Arabic, but they wrote their book in English.” They also questioned the authorship and the authenticity of the text. Before we read *Night of the Moon* (Khan, 2008), Mai took the book and flipped through the pages; then, she said, “this is not Arabic.” After we read the book, I asked, “what do you think of this book…what would you tell the author?” The following conversation illustrates her perspectives:

Mai: To make more books.

Amal: About what?

Mai: About Arabic.

Amal: So, you think this story has no Arabic?
Mai: I think she is not Arabic.

(Transcription, March 7, 2019)

Mai shared that the author, Hena Khan, is not Arabic. Her prediction about the author’s ethnicity was based on her thoughts on how the Arabic language and culture were depicted in the text. The presence of the literature about the Middle East made the focal students conscious about what they knew and what was available around them. When the focal students interacted with English texts that reflected their world, they noticed the lack of books written in the Arabic language in their school. The students wanted the authors to write more books in the Arabic language about the Middle East. As demonstrated earlier, after we read Night of the Moon (Khan, 2008), Mai wanted the author, as she stated, “to make more books… about Arabic.” Mai also thought that Hena Khan would learn more as she researched new books. Even young children are aware of this message. The focal students’ wonderings, questions, and actions reflect how they seemed to realize that not only is their culture missing from school, but also their language.

The following conversation was held after Ziad mentioned that Golden Domes and Silver Lanterns (Khan, 2012) was his favorite book. Ziad seemed astonished by the richly detailed stylized illustrations, as he was holding the text and touching the illustrations:

Amal: What do you think of this book?

Ziad: I like the color of the masjid. (points to the masjid, and flips the pages, and points to the Quran). Do you know who wrote this book?

Amal: Yeah… it's written right here, Hena Khan.

Ziad: Is she Muslim?

Amal: Why you asked this question?

Ziad: This (points to the masjid).
(Field Notes, Interview, January 29, 2019)

Ziad’s questions revealed his thinking about how the author depicted Islam’s culture in this text authentically. The text introduces common Islamic concepts such as prayer rug, hijab, mosque, traditional cap, Ramadan, Eid, and Quran. His question, “is she Muslim?” suggested the importance of the realistic portrayal of his culture, and only insiders can do that. As previously demonstrated, Ziad’s engagement in analyzing illustrations in texts reveals his awareness and thoughtful interaction with visuals.

The Arabic alphabets frequently grabbed the focal students’ attention. In the following conversation held during a discussion of Silent Music (Rumford, 2009), Ziad wondered about the illustration that shows two boys sitting next to each other and writing Arabic letters on worksheets, and an adult (teacher) holding an Arabic grammar textbook:

Amal: [Reading]…

Moya: هذا (This is) Arabic school?

Amal: What do you think?

Ziad: Read العربي (the Arabic) (points to the illustration).

(Transcription, January 17, 2018)

Ziad went close to the text, trying to read the Arabic letters and words that he noticed in the illustration. He directed me, “read the Arabic.” As I was reading, he continued questioning and pointing to the Arabic writing, “what?” “where is it?” and “what letter he is writing?” His questioning reflects how he recognized the Arabic language in the illustration and engaged in criticizing the authenticity in depicting it through pausing, questioning, and checking with me. He also entered the story’s world and questioned the characters’ acts, such as “he did not write anything!” “why he is writing like that?” and “is he copying?”
**Questioning the Characters in Texts.** The focal students questioned characters identities, languages, locations, actions, and feelings throughout the research study, such as, “they talk Arabic or English?” “is she Arabic?” “is she Muslim?” “where are they?” and “why she is mad?”

The following excerpt was held during the read-aloud of *Night of the Moon*, after Mai asked, “why they look at the moon?”

Amal: What do you think?

Mai: I think they like the moon… they like watching the moon…

*(Transcription, March 7, 2019)*

Her question reflects an essential aspect educators need to consider: there is no one way of being a Muslim, and there is no one way of practicing Ramadan. The text focuses on watching the moon, which is not a well-known practice by all Muslims, especially young people. Most picture books about Ramadan talk about the moon and its shapes, such as *Ramadan Moon* (Robert, 2009) and *Under the Ramadan Moon* (Whiteman, 2008). Although Muslims depend on the moon’s cycle to know the beginning and the ending dates of Ramadan, watching it is not required because there are professionals responsible for watching for the moon. Therefore, not all children would have the background knowledge about the moon as a pointed sign for Ramadan. Since culture impacts how religion is practiced, the practice of watching the moon is connected to the culture of a specific group of people.

**Exploring Each Other.** Throughout the read-alouds, the focal students asked questions as they came to know about each other. When they saw the illustration of a mosque during *Golden Domes and Silver Lanterns’* (Khan, 2012) read-aloud discussion, they all shared the name of mosques they went to. The following conversation illustrated their engagement as they explored each other:
Ziad: I go to masjid Salma…

Moh: Me too!

Ziad: I go there, I don’t see you! (talks to Moh) …

Amal: There is another masjid in Lat, I went there once in Ramadan.

Moh: When you go? (talks to Ziad) …

Moya: Yeah, I go there… it is big…

Yan: I go there too!

Ziad: I saw Khalid in that masjid… You go there? (talks to Yan) …

(Transcription, January 12, 2018)

The students listened and built on each other’s responses. Ziad connected to his life as he asked Moh and Yan questions that confirmed which masjid they went to. Instead of merely stating “me too,” Ziad’s response, “I go there, I don’t see you!” encouraged Moh to ask questions and provide more information. As the conversation continued, both Moh and Ziad asked more questions like “when you go there?” and “where you pray at the masjid?”

The students also explored each other’s demographic information, daily activities, and favorite hobbies and food. In the following exchange held during a read-aloud of Celebrate Ramadan and Eid Al-Fitr (Heiligman, 2009), the illustrations depicting a group of people gathered for a meal opened a discussion on foods:

Mai: …And do you eat irresponsible (rice)?

Yan: Yes, I eat rice.

Mai: Do you eat Indomie (a brand of noodle)?

Yan: That is my favorite food!

Mai: Me too!
Yan: I eat it with hot sauce… Do you eat macaroni?

Amal: Yes.

Mai: I eat that, I eat that, (points to picture).

Yan: When I go to my grandma’s house, I eat Indomie.

(Transcription, January 18, 2019)

Mai and Yan led the conversation in this last excerpt and shared insights about their lives. Through the illustrations, they connected to their lives and shared their favorite foods.

**Cultural and Linguistic Pluralism**

The students were knowledgeable and aware of their use of language. They responded and acted differently across multiple contexts throughout the study; the way they spoke and what language(s) they used was based on which context they were in. Therefore, whenever the focal students came to the culturally sustaining context, they seemed to remind each other to be themselves. They encouraged each other to speak in Arabic. During the read-aloud discussions, Mai repeatedly asked Ziad, Yan, and me to speak Arabic, saying, “it’s ok you can speak Arabic” and “speak Arabic.”

**Translanguaging.** Kohnert et al. (2005) posit that “language is the major vehicle for communicating the family’s values and expectations, expressing care and concern, providing structure and discipline, and interpreting world experiences” (p. 253). The use of literature about the Middle East and the interactive read-alouds created an opportunity for the focal students to engage in translanguaging. While some books do not include the language component in them, such as *Lost and Found Cat* (Kuntz & Shrodes, 2017), they depict specific details about the Muslim world, such as the hijab. Such books invited the students to draw on their linguistic repertoires. During our conversations, the students used both languages (Arabic and English) to
engage in meaning-making (Garcia, 2009). They recognized this practice as an acceptable pedagogical practice, especially when they saw me engage in translinguaging as we responded to literature (Creese & Blackledge, 2015). In the following excerpt, Mai and I engaged in a discussion about Allah after Mai pointed to the illustration that depicted an old man with a long beard in Lost and Found Cat (Kuntz & Shrodes, 2017), and said, “this is Allah.”

Amal: Mmm… Why did you say that?

Mai: It is like Allah because of this (points to the character’s beard).

Amal: Aha, tell me more.

Mai: Mmm…because god is big, and he has those big (points to the character’s beard and hat).

Amal: Mmm…

Mai: God can يﺪخﻠﻚ (put you in hell).

Amal: ليه وش السبب (Why? what would be the reason?).

Mai: مأذن (If we lie) and مااذا ماتصل (don’t pray) and died, you can get to النار (hell), and sometimes God put you in a lot of things.

Amal: A lot of things, like what?

Mai: Like foods, toys…

Amal: Aha, like good people go to heaven, الجنة.

Mai: Yes, الجنة (heaven).

(Transcription, November 14, 2018)

Although it is not normal for Muslims to engage in discussions about Allah’s appearance and as an anthropomorph concept, Mai engaged freely in a responsive and critical discussion where she could name and share her thoughts freely. Drawing on her bilingual repertoire, Mai chose to
share the name of “Allah” and then as she engaged in discussion, she referred to him as “God.” Mai started her sentences using English and ended with Arabic and vice versa. Her engagement in translanguaging shows the level of complexity and flexibility as she included her full linguistic repertoire (García, 2009). Mai does not have a specific rule on when to speak a specific language; instead, she focused on sharing her points, not on which language to speak (Osorio, 2020; Seltzer & García, 2019). As in the previous excerpt, instead of pausing to think how to say words in English, Mai worked to forge deep personal connections between herself and the text. The interaction between two languages supported the learning and engagement of bilinguals.

When focal students accessed their first language, their conversations became more detailed. Throughout the research study, the students used both languages to convey their messages (Greese & Blackledge, 2010) in the culturally sustaining context. However, in their classrooms, they only occasionally inserted some Arabic words and they did not engage in translanguaging. This shows how language “is performed differently depending on context” (Espana & Herrera, 2020, p. 6). Therefore, the focal students switched their conversation styles depending on where they were and whom they were talking to.

The focal students’ engagement in translanguaging revealed a sense of identity and agency that comes when using their linguistic repertoires (Creese & Blackledge, 2015; García-Mateus & Palmer, 2017). Throughout the study, they negotiated identity positions as they drew on their linguistic resources. As the students engaged in bilingual conversations, their translanguaging reveals how they negotiated their identities. Their backgrounds and real lives played an intrinsic role in their identities. Throughout the study, they identified as belonging to a specific space, religion, and cultural practice, which they saw in texts or heard in the discussion. Therefore, language was not only a means of communication, but also a reflection of socio-
cultural practices and beliefs. The use of translanguaging while interacting with literature about the Middle East throughout this study was a form of culturally sustaining pedagogy (Paris, 2012).

**Read-Aloud to Support Students’ Enjoyment**

The Arabic-speaking students enjoyed the experience of reading literature that mirrored their lives in the culturally sustaining context. While Ziad and Yan thought that the culturally sustaining context was more comfortable and relaxing than their classrooms, Mai provided interesting insights. She indicated to me that she wished to read literature about the Middle East, but not in her classroom. As she said, “because in my class they are doing work… like work that we need to get it done and they get to do homework…” (*Interview, Transcription*, October 4, 2018). This perspective shows Mai experienced reading the diverse children’s literature in the culturally sustaining context as a supplement, contrasting it with her classroom as a place to get work done. According to her teacher, Ms. Sofia, “Mai is really good at like knowing we do 5-finger rule books …books that are just right for you, and Mai is really like conscious making sure of books that she can read …” (*Field Notes, Interview*, February 5, 2019). Ms. Sofia’s (and Mai’s) perspective indicates how Mai was a responsible person and aware of her surroundings and the expectations within those surroundings. It also indicates how Mai took ownership of her own choices.

The other Arabic-speaking students, however, transferred their excitement toward the literature about the Middle East into their grade-level classrooms. They were eager to share the texts and what they have learned in the culturally sustaining context. According to Ms. Sofia:

I have seen them when they see you, they like to light up, … they are really excited to work with you and then when they come back, they like love to share with everyone else.
If you give them a book…, like what you said, culturally relevant for them, they are always sharing like buddy reading with someone. So, I think all that you have done and you have also brought light for me… *(Field Notes, Interview, February 5, 2019)*

The culturally sustaining context supported the focal students’ identity, cultural and linguistic pluralism, and critical consciousness *(Zoch, 2017)*. When the students were free to lead the read-aloud, they became active responders to literature as they actively shared their dramatizations, questions, and predictions, using their comfortable language(s). Their active engagement illustrated that it is not only about seeing themselves in books, but also establishing a freedom space where they could be fully themselves in response to the books. The next chapter provides portraits of individual students: Mai, Yan, and Ziad.
Chapter 6

Portraits of Students’ Engagement with Children’s Literature about the Middle East

Across Multiple Contexts

This chapter offers in-depth portraits of the students’ engagement with read-alouds across the three settings (grade-level classroom, ENL classroom, and culturally sustaining context). The first portrait explores Mai, who positioned herself as a knower and cultural informant, as she shared her cultural background. The second portrait illustrates Yan’s unique connections, disconnections, and suggestions during literature discussions. The third portrait explores Ziad’s critical way of questioning his realities.

Mai: Knower and Cultural Informant

“Hijab is for girls, not for boys” ~Mai

In this section, I provide a portrait of Mai as she engaged in meaning-making with the literature across multiple contexts: grade-level classroom, ENL classroom, and culturally sustaining context. Mai positioned herself as responsible for educating people about her culture and religion. As she lived through the literature, Mai provided connections and went deep to provide lessons about her cultural background.

Mai was born in Yemen. She moved to the United States when she was about five. She was the oldest of two children. Her younger siblings are both brothers. Mai’s mother was a stay-at-home mom; her father worked all day in sales. Her mother could not read, speak, or write in English. Mai’s father could speak English, but he could not write or read. Her mother wanted to learn English, but she could not because she had to babysit her kids. Mai was responsible for her school homework and was enrolled in an after-school program. At school, Mai was a social and lively person with an expressive face. She was curious and liked to ask questions.
At first, Mai quietly participated throughout the research study contexts. She was brief about her life experiences. For example, there were multiple read-alouds in the ENL classroom where she sat close to the book, looking at it and touching it, without sharing a word. However, as the weeks progressed, Mai became more verbally expressive.

Mai shared her life experiences and cultural practices with her teachers. She liked to celebrate Eid with her teachers and friends at school. During Eid, Mai came to school dressed up and wearing henna all over her hands (*Field notes*, June 18, 2018). She also wore a hijab. Sometimes she put it on, and sometimes she took it off. According to Mai, she wore a hijab because her classroom teacher, Ms. Sofia, wanted to see it (*Field notes*, 2nd grade classroom, December 20, 2018). Mai referred to the hijab with multiple names. She used the word: *mkmara*, which comes from the word, khimar, and used that word several times throughout the three contexts. During the read-aloud of *Mommy's Khimar* (Thompkins-Bigelow, 2018), Mai shared, “my mom wears it... it called hijab or *mkmara*… I wear hijab, I wear it to pray… in my other class, everybody sees it, it’s white and some brown” (*Field Notes*, 2nd grade classroom, December 12, 2018). Some people think there are slight differences between hijab and khimar/*mkmara* (in the parts they cover), while others use them interchangeably. When I read the same book in the culturally sustaining context, Mai provided more specific details about how, why, and where she wears the hijab, who should wear it, and who should not. Similar to her response in her second-grade classroom, Mai shared her reason for wearing a hijab saying, “I wanna wear it…because I pray with it” (*Transcription*, October 30, 2018). When responding through writing, Mai also wrote, “I like my khimar because I can pray. Girls wear khimar because girls pray. Moms pray wear khimar. Because we have to pray” and she drew a little girl
wearing a hijab (Field Notes, culturally sustaining context, November 2, 2018). Mai’s written response explained the purpose of wearing a hijab.

During the read-aloud of Mommy’s Khimar (Thompkins-Bigelow, 2018), the students engaged with the illustrations that showed a mother standing in front of a mirror and wrapping her hijab around her head. The conversation extended to other possibilities of what boys should wear, as Mai contributed her thoughts in the following conversation:

Amal: [Reading]…

Ziad: امها بﺘﻠبﺲ ع راسها هذا الحجاب او المخمرة (Her mom wears a hijab on her head) … (talks about the illustration).

Mai: Pray, ﷲ اكبر (Allah Akbar).

Ziad: My mom wears a hijab like this, she put it like this, and she does like that (uses his t-shirt and both hands).

Mai: (Laughter) …

Ziad: I have green, red, …

Amal: Do you wear a hijab?

Mai: No, boys don’t wear hijab!

Amal: Why boys don’t wear hijab?

Mai: They wear something else, it’s like this, and they put something on the top (uses her both hands).

Ziad: I don’t wear hijab, I wear that thing when I go ﷲ اكبر (Allah Akbar).

Amal: She said, boys don’t wear hijab, they wear something else…

Mai: It is white…

Yan: Yes!
Amal: And they put something like…

Yan: A hat.

Amal: Like a white hat?

Ziad: I don’t wear this thing…

Mai: It is not a white hat, it is white, and they wear it up here, and they have a circle that is black, they put it on, and they pray (uses her both hands).

Amal: Aha…

Yan: The hat is white, not black! …

(Transcription, Culturally sustaining context, October 30, 2018)

Mai positioned herself as the knower, especially when we engaged in discussions about gender, religious, and cultural expectations. In the previous exchange, her exclamation that boys do not wear hijab reflects her knowledge about gender limitations. Mai drew on her cultural knowledge to connect to the text and the world (Brooks & Browne, 2012). She provided a detailed description of the traditional Arab clothing for males. She also continued arguing with Yan about the style and color of the head-dressing for males, which usually comes in different colors and styles, and has different names, depending on the countries or regions. As Yan thought it was a white hat, Mai believed it was a black, not white, circular thing that was placed above a white scarf, not a hat.

Throughout the research study, Mai shared responses that indicate her awareness of gender expectations and stereotypes such as, “moms are not strong…because they can’t build their house” (Field Notes, 1:1 Interview, February 5, 2019). Mai’s understanding of gender expectations mirrored her culture and society’s traditional beliefs regarding what it means to be a
boy or a girl. In the following conversation held during a discussion of *Night of the Moon* (Khan, 2008), Mai, Yan, and I talked about why boys do not wear henna:

Mai: He is a boy!

Amal: Why boys don’t wear henna?

Mai: Because some boys can hide the henna.

Amal: Why they hide it?

Mai: Because they want no girls to see it. Because if girls see it, girls will laugh at him.

Amal: Why they laugh at him?

Yan: Because boys don’t wear henna.

Mai: Because boys don’t wear henna…

Amal: Why boys don’t wear this? (asking Yan).

Yan: Because the girls are pretty and the boys are not.

*(Transcription, March 7, 2019)*

Before I read aloud the words on the page, the students were eager to talk about the illustration that showed both hands with henna tattoo design. Similar to her exclamation for boys wearing the hijab, Mai’s exclamation that boys wearing henna did not match her gender expectations for boys. Both Mai and Yan agreed that boys should not wear henna, yet they have different reasons.

At times, Mai seemed to somewhat take on a leader or supervisor role in our culturally sustaining context. For Mai, how religion was practiced was more static, not flexible. In the following excerpt conducted during the read-aloud of *Celebrate Ramadan and Eid Al-Fitr* (Heiligman, 2009), Mai disclosed her belief of how people should pray:

Mai: I pray every day like this (stands up and performs praying).

Yan: (Stands up and performs praying).
Mai: It’s not like this, look…like this (speaks to Yan) …

(Transcription, January 18, 2019)

Mai confidently and spontaneously stood up and performed praying similar to her performance in response to *Deep in the Sahara* (Cunnane, 2013) in the previous chapter. This time, however, she criticized Yan’s praying practice and demonstrated to him how praying should be.

Discussions about the character’s action often invited Mai to offer her judgments and recommendations such as, “هذا حرام (this is sinful or forbidden),” “if you lie, you will go to النار (hell),” and “you have to wash your face before you pray.” In response to *Deep in the Sahara* (Cunnane, 2013), Mai made some religious belief connections. She contributed her thoughts in the following discussion:

Mai: I like this one!

Amal: I like it too... why?

Mai: Because it is pink and because it is pretty...

Amal: Yeah… and she is covering her face, showing only her eyes.

Mai: Because she doesn’t want no boys to see her.

Amal: Why?

Mai: Because she is Arabic, I think she lives in Yemen.

Amal: Mmmm. So, you think they are in Yemen. Why?

Mai: Sometimes they cover their face.

(Transcription, culturally sustaining context, February 11, 2019)

The illustration that shows a character wearing a pink dress covering all her body except her eyes and carting a tray on her head grabbed Mai’s attention. Mai believed the character was covered up because she “doesn’t want no boys to see her.” Mai entered the story’s world thinking about
why the character acted in a certain way and provided her explanations (Sipe, 2008). Although the book is set in Mauritania, Mai believed it was in Yemen. She thought that the girl was Yemeni and did not want males to look at her. When Mai first saw the book, however, she shared different prediction about it as she said, “this is Hindi” (Indian). She connected the characters’ dress style on the cover page to the Indian girl that she met out-of-school (Field Notes, 1:1 Interview, February 5, 2019). Later in the conversation, Mai also added an example of her mom covering her face as she stated, “my mom wears it sometimes…when she goes to a party and there are like moms, boys, dads, girls” (Transcription, February 11, 2019). She wanted to support her point by connecting with her mom, covering up like the story’s character.

In addition to cultural and religious practices, Mai was also open to sharing her Arabic language. As demonstrated in chapters five and six, Mai shared Arabic words as she responded to literature. One time she brought a Yemeni Arabic textbook for fifth-grade from home. She shared this book with her teachers, classmates, and me. Mai said to me, “look!” with a big smile on her face; she also asked me to read some pages (Field Notes, culturally sustaining context, March 21, 2019). Although Mai was aware that her teachers and classmates could not read Arabic, sharing the Arabic text indicates her willingness to invite them to her world.

Mai’s mother appreciated it when the school invited their culture as she stated, شعرت بالسعادة عندما طلبت المدرسة مني أن تحضر طعامنا أو تلبس الملابس اليمنية (Transcription) “I felt happy when the school asked Mai to bring our food or dress the Yemeni clothes.” After I shared with her children’s literature about the Middle East, such as Golden Domes and Silver Lanterns (Khan, 2012), Mai connected to herself when she saw a book about Yemen. She shared with excitement that when she went to a hospital with her brother and saw a book that reflected Yemeni culture and history, saying:
I only saw the pictures because I can’t read; I told my brother, look! This is Yemen, so my brother read it for me. He asked if we could borrow it. I felt happy to see that book there for people to know about us, I don’t want to take it home. I like it there so people can see it. But we took it with us. (Translation, Interview with Mai’s mother, January 26, 2019).

Both Mai and her mother appreciated seeing reflections of themselves, their culture, and language in the school (Bishop, 1997). As Mai’s mother noticed the lack of knowledge about her culture in the school and society, she tried, similar to her daughter, to share her culture with the teachers. The following excerpt illustrates Mai’s mother’s thoughts on navigating schooling and cultural differences when she received a Christmas gift:

The teacher wanted to give me a gift for the kids, but I told her that I can’t take it because we don’t celebrate Christmas. I explained that I could accept your gift any day, like if you keep it, I can take it after Christmas. So… the next day, I brought flowers for her as a way to say thank you… and I don’t want her to feel bad that I didn’t accept her gift. (Translation, Interview with Mai’s mother, January 26, 2019)

Mai’s mother appreciated the teacher’s efforts and also felt perplexed. As she introduced her beliefs about not celebrating Christmas and provided suggestions on how she handled Christmas
gifts, she also felt guilty for not accepting the teacher’s gift. This example shows that instead of merely adapting to the system’s norms, Mai’s mother employed such a situation as a means for negotiating home and school worlds and introducing her culture. It also shows that families can be a great resource to raise teachers’ awareness of Middle Eastern or Muslim cultures. However, communication between teachers and some Middle Eastern families, such as Mai’s mother, was challenging due to language differences. Due to the lack of language, Mai’s mother was not confident in explaining her culture to the teacher. As she said, “I’m not sure if she understood me.” According to Mai’s mother, she used Google Translate App to assist her explanations while she was talking to the teacher, although it is not an accurate way of translation and can sometimes lead to misunderstanding.

**Yan: When Disconnections Become Connections**

“Change the book” ~Yan

This section includes Yan’s portrait as he engaged in meaning-making with the literature across multiple contexts: grade-level classroom, ENL classroom, and culturally sustaining context.

Yan was born in Syria. Originally from Iraq, he moved to the United States in 2013. He lives with his mother, father, and his older brother. Yan’s grandmother lives in the States, and often comes to visit them. His mom works full-time at a hospital. Usually, Yan’s father comes to pick him from school, and sometimes his grandmother. Both his mother and father speak English. Although Yan understands some Arabic, he did not often spontaneously share Arabic words, as the other focal students. When sharing in the culturally sustaining context, he asked several times, “I know how to say this in Arabic! Can I say it?” *(Field Notes, March 22, 2019).* According to Yan’s mother, they spoke Arabic with him at home, but he did not speak Arabic;
he preferred talking in English. His mother wanted Yan to learn Arabic. She was excited about her son reading books about the Middle East. As she said:

I wish for my child to read books about the Middle East in Arabic, or in English too… I think my child likes these books, especially when reading them at school… But you know, Middle Eastern books are not easy to find here in the US, and in the English language. *(Interview with Yan’s mother, March 21, 2019)*

Similar to Mai’s mother, Yan’s mother noticed the lack of books about the Middle East, as she said, “Middle Eastern books are not easy to find here in the US…” She valued the experience that her child was reading books about the Middle East in the school. She also appreciated that her child could engage in such books using English and/or Arabic language(s). As she suggested, “when he talks some words in English, please tell him or ask him, do you know the meaning of this word in Arabic?” Her suggestion indicated she saw the culturally sustaining context as a space for Yan to learn about his culture and his native language. Noticing what was not available was an essential step that reflected his mothers’ social consciousness (McNair, 2013).

At school, Yan was advanced in English. He joined the pull-out ENL group. He was quiet and shy, and stayed to himself. He did not initiate conversation or ask questions, and was an engaged learner. Yan liked to share with me what he had been working on in the classroom. One day he shared his letter to his classmate, “Dear Antino, you are my best best friend” and drew a picture of himself, Antino, and a dinosaur *(Field notes, grade-level classroom, December 20, 2018)*. Yan also invited me several times to his school activities, such as reading words for his STEM project and joining his class in the gym *(Field Notes, October 18, 2018, December 5, 2018)*.
Yan always provided unique and insightful responses to literature. He often surprised me with his responses, which frequently needed further explorations. The shared linguistic and cultural experience I had with the focal students facilitated my understanding as I made sense of my data. However, Yan always brought his own and unique perspectives; he liked to talk, draw, and write about his family, favorite animals, and video games. For example, the character who is spelling the word of Allah in the *Golden Domes and Silver Lanterns* (Khan, 2012) reminded Yan of a video game called Bendy and the Ink Machine. Because there was no elaboration on Yan’s comment, Ms. Nancy could not recognize the game. Instead, she stated, “so you like this page because of the Bendy guy, but what was special about Muslims on this page? What was this girl doing on this page that was special?” “Drawing with pen,” Yan replied (*Field Notes*, ENL classroom, March 1, 2018). When the focal students engaged in a written response to the same book, in the culturally sustaining context, Yan also drew a picture of his favorite video games. In the following excerpt, he explained his drawing:

Yan: This is a castle. And he is my dad; he has gloves, …

Amal: Mmm, what is he doing there?

Yan: He is trying to grab that star…this is my bob; he is helping my dad get the star…This is my brother…My brother always plays with his phone, and he won’t let me play… I don’t have a phone, my brother has one… he plays all different kinds of games; he plays Blocksworld, Castle of Magic too…

(*Transcription*, February 1, 2018)

In both culturally sustaining and ENL contexts, Yan chose to share his interest in video games. In the previous excerpt, he shared a personal story about his older brother, who has a phone and not letting him play, and then he provided examples of his favorite games. During the read-
aloud, Yan referred to the picture of the mosque as a castle multiple times. Yan arrived in the United States when he was only two years old. He was not as engaged with the Arabic community as the other focal students and did not share going to a mosque like the other focal students. Therefore, sometimes it was unlikely for Yan to use the books as mirrors; instead, he used books as windows to know more about his culture and community. When I asked Yan about his thought on the literature that we read throughout the study, he said, “they make us learn about stuff…they make us learn about Arabic…these books are good to read” (1:1 Interview, January 29, 2019).

There were times when I noticed that Yan’s disconnections became connections. In the following conversation held during the discussion of *Lost and Found Cat* (Kuntz & Shrodes, 2017), Yan engaged in an intertextual connection as he predicted why the characters left their home:

Amal: Why you think they want to leave Iraq?
Yan: Because it is not cool.
Amal: Why is it not cool?
Mai: Because her dad died?
Amal: Aha, what else you think?
Yan: Because the bad guys.
Amal: The bad guys! Mmmm... Tell us more about the bad guys.
Ziad: I know, I know. Maybe there are some strangers [who] kill them, and maybe the stranger still going to kill the cat.

*(Transcription, culturally sustaining context, November 8, 2018)*
Although there are no soldiers mentioned or illustrated in the text, Yan thought the characters were moving to a different country because of soldiers he saw in another text read previously, *Nasreen’s Secret School* (Winter, 2009). Yan referred to the soldiers as “bad boys/guys/people.” Yan’s prediction and connection show deep engagement across the texts.

**Alternative Viewpoints and Suggestions**

Yan often positioned himself as someone who critiques the books and their authors and illustrators. He was curious about the illustrations in the literature and provided suggestions to the authors and illustrators to make their books more enjoyable and meaningful to him by changing some pages and adding details to the illustrations (Vasquez, 2014; Botelho & Rudman, 2009; Sipe, 1996). For example, when we read *Salam Alaikum. A Message of Peace* (Harris J, 2017), Yan critiqued the illustration that depicted people having fun in a park after a rainy day. As he stated, “it is still not sunny, it is cloudy…it is still cloudy” (*Transcription*, October 24, 2018). In this response, Yan compared the illustrations in the book to his existing knowledge about the weather. He argued about the authenticity of the illustration as being not sunny enough for people to have an outdoor picnic in the park. Later in the discussion, Yan suggested the illustrator, “add more birds because they look cool” and continued by remarking, “put more colors.”

Across the read-alouds, Yan sometimes spoke back to the text and suggested alternatives based on his cultural knowledge. When we read *Nasreen’s Secret School* (Winter, 2009), Yan shared perspectives that differed from the text and challenged the author’s point of view. Yan wanted the author to exclude the images of the soldiers in the story who were restricting girls’ access to schools and causing family separations, writing, “Jeanette Winter, we need you to change the book. Make the bad people leave.” (*Field Notes*, October 4, 2018). Yan then drew a
picture that showed all the family members together and feeling happy. In Yan’s words directed to the author and in his drawing, he provided a concrete resolution to the story where the family reunited at the end, rather than Winter’s more ambiguous ending.

Figure 3

Yan' Drawing "Nasreen Secret School"

Ziad: Questioning the World

“Why is there a war?” ~Ziad

This section illustrates a portrait of Ziad as he engaged in meaning-making of the literature across multiple contexts: grade-level classroom, ENL classroom, and culturally sustaining context. While Mai drew on her background knowledge and Yan offered alternatives to make sense of the story, Ziad engaged in questioning his realities.

Ziad is a lively boy with an expressive face who was born in Syria in 2011. He moved to the United States in July 2016. Ziad lives with his parents, his younger sister, and his two older
brothers. Moya, in this study, is his older brother. Ziad’s mother is a stay-at-home mom and his father works in a restaurant.

In the culturally sustaining context, Ziad often spoke about his family and his life. He was excited to share his connections with the stories. Ziad’s connections to the literature often illustrate praying and hijab. Ziad was often expressive in showing his reactions to the literature through dramatizing and predicting the characters’ feelings and reactions (Sipe, 2008). As I explained in chapter five, Ziad was deeply engaged in the read-alouds through dramatization. Engaging with the literature about the Middle East in the culturally sustaining context provided a space for Ziad to enact his understanding through involving the characters in the story (Adomat, 2012). Ziad was also engaged with what others have to say in the group by adding his opinions.

Ziad knew how to write his first name and some alphabets in Arabic. Like the other focal students, the Arabic letters and words in the literature grabbed his attention (Martínez-Roldán, 2000). For example, the Arabic calligraphy in Silent Music (Rumford, 2009) attracted Ziad as he was eager to share his Arabic writings with me. When responding to the literature through writing, Ziad added Arabic letters to his drawings. After drawing a picture of a house and writing some Arabic letters above the house, he showed the group his writing (Field Notes, January 30, 2018). The Arabic letters Ziad produced made him proud of himself, although he speaks English with his siblings at home. According to his mother:

في المنزل، أولادي يبحكون اللغة الإنجليزية مع بعضهم... هم ماكتبوا او يقرأوا باللغة العربية، لكنني على الأقل أريدهم أن يتكلموا العربية... حتى لا ينسوا... أتمنى لو يدرسوا اللغة العربية في المدرسة حتى يتمكن أولادي من تعلم لغتهم...

(Transcription)

At home, my children speak English with each other…They don’t write or read in Arabic, but at least I want them to speak Arabic, so they don’t forget it… I wish they
teach Arabic at school so my children can learn their language. (Translation, *Home Interview*, March 5, 2019).

Similar to Yan, Ziad was more comfortable using the English language at home with his siblings. Ziad’s mother valued the use of Arabic language at home, as she said, “at least I want them to speak Arabic, so they don’t forget it.” Similar to Yan’s mother, she also wished the school could teach the Arabic language.

In the ENL classroom, Sometimes Ziad inserted Arabic words as he responded to the teacher’s questions, as in the following conversation that was held during a discussion of *Silent Music* (Rumford, 2009):

Ms. Nancy: When we play a sport, sometimes we kick a ball. What sport when we kick a ball?

Ziad: لعبه (A game).

Ms. Nancy: What is that in English?

Ziad: هدف (Goal).

Ms. Nancy: What is a sport? What something a game?

Ziad: حارس المرمى (Goalkeeper).

Ms. Nancy: Friends, friends, you don’t do that normally. So stop acting. So what is a game when we kick a ball?... Do you wanna pick up another book? Can you tell me in English?

Ziad: A soccer ball.

Ms. Nancy: Thank you, Ziad!

... 

Ms. Nancy: Is he writing our alphabet, Ziad?
Ziad: *Alef* (the Arabic word for the letter A)

Ms. Nancy: What is *alef*?

Ziad: (Laughter).

Ms. Nancy: …Are they writing our letters?

Moya: No, these letters are Arabic.

*(Transcription, January 25, 2018)*

When I shared the previous excerpt with Ziad’s mother, she reacted surprisingly, هو قال ذلك! أعتقد أنه سعيد جدًا برؤية ثقافته في الكتاب... *(Transcription), “he said that! (with laughter) …I think he was delighted to see his culture reflected in the book” (Translation, Home Interview, March 5, 2019). Mentioning the word, *Alef* indicates that instead of only responding with yes or no, Ziad expanded through sharing an example of the alphabets he saw in the text. Although the teacher tried to help him explain, Ziad did not wish to participate in the conversation. Sometimes using the Arabic language caused misunderstanding between the teacher and the student. I noticed the teacher-student misunderstanding occurred multiple times in the ENL classroom. When Ms. Nancy did not pick up what the focal students said, she thought they were not paying attention. As she said in a quick conversation, “usually they don’t do that, they only speak English… that is because of the book and you there...” *(Field Notes, April 25, 2018)*. Ms. Nancy continued remarking that the focal students usually do not speak Arabic in their ENL classroom “because they know the expectation (in this class is) to learn English” *(Interview, April 20, 2018)*. Ms. Nancy also shared that Ziad was more verbal when reading books that reflect his culture. Ziad was more active reading such books in a small group (ENL and culturally sustaining contexts) than in the grade-level classroom setting. Similar to Yan, Ziad did not share his personal life in the grade-level classroom. Ziad was social and always got along with the other students. When
asked, he was very brief about his background (*Field Notes*, May 25, 2018, October 18, 2018, December 12, 2018).

Throughout the read-alouds in our culturally sustaining context, Ziad posed questions for the world and the group, including myself, such as, “do you love God?” “are you Muslim?” “are you from Syria?” “do you speak Iraqi?” “do you pray?” “why is there a war?” and “why are there guns?” Ziad went beyond questioning the texts to explore more about his surroundings. In the following conversation held during a discussion of the *Librarian of Basra* (Winter, 2005), Ziad, Mai, Moh, and I engaged in a sensitive discussion about the war in Syria:

Ziad: ليش عم بيعملوا حرب؟ (Why is there a war?).

Amal: What do you think?

Moh: Because they want to kill people.

Ziad: لان بيتهم بيخرب (Their house will be destroyed).

Amal: What else?

Ziad: بعدين بيموتوا (They will die).

Mai: بيموتوا وهم يسيروا (They die while they are walking).

Ziad: … وبيطلع حريق (And there will be fire).

Amal: [Reading]...

Ziad: In Syria, they do this.

Amal: How?

Ziad: Bashar kills all the world.

Amal: Say more.

Ziad: He doesn’t like the people because all the boys and the girls want to go to Syria, and he shoots them.
Amal: Why you think he does that?

Ziad: He doesn’t like them.

Amal: Why?

Ziad: Some of them hide, and they are trying to hit him.

Moh: Yeah, with their gun. My little brother in Syria they gun him… I feel bad because they got my brother, the baby. And all the house got fire.

Ziad: And then, the guys are trying to hit him … He shot the boys!

Amal: Why the boys?

Ziad: And the moms and the dads, all of them…

Mai: Yeah…

Ziad: And the babies too… All my toys in Syria…

(Transcription, May 22, 2018)

Drawing on multiple cultural and linguistic resources, Ziad shared his personal experiences as he responded to the text. Ziad started the previous conversation by questioning the world, “why is there a war?” right after he saw the illustrations that depicted two soldiers with guns standing on the roof of a building. Then Ziad engaged in a discussion about what happened in Syria, which indicated his awareness of his surroundings. The illustrations that show a firestorm of bombs throughout the city reminded him of the war in his country as he stated, “in Syria, they do this.” Ziad consciously engaged in critical discussion through questioning and naming his realities (Freire, 2000; Vasquez, 2014; Janks, 2012). He shared the information he collected from his family. According to his mother:
Ziad didn’t see the war, but he hears us talk about it. We left Syria when they were young… they don’t remember anything. The war started when I was pregnant with my son, Ziad… I was thankful after I delivered him because there was tear gas close to us …We had to escape from Syria to a camp in Jorden… We left all our stuff in Syria…

(Translation, Home Interview, March 5, 2019)

When Ziad’s mother explained her life experience in Syria she shared details about her family and how they managed to escape the war. The previous excerpt shows how students learn and adopt perspectives from their social norms and cultural milieus (Heath, 1983). Ziad’s responses to literature were influenced by what his family shared with him at home.

In this chapter, I looked closely at three students’ engagement with literature about the Middle East across multiple settings. Each portrait reflected how such literature and read-aloud instruction influenced the students’ literary engagement. Each student presented unique and interesting perspectives. Mai positioned herself as the knowledgeable and expert/leader; Yan proposed alternatives for authors and illustrators; Ziad openly questioned and disrupted his realities. The more they shared, the more confident they became. As I explore in the next chapter, I envision experiences such as these would work at expanding our practice with diverse books in multilingual classrooms.
Chapter 7

Discussions and Implications

In this concluding chapter, I discuss my understanding of the findings on the two questions that guided this dissertation:

1. What is the nature of Arabic-speaking students’ engagement with children’s literature about the Middle East in the grade-level and ENL classrooms?
2. How do Arabic-speaking students respond when I read children’s literature about the Middle East in a culturally sustaining context?

I also present implications of this study for teachers, teacher educators, policymakers, and researchers. I hope that this research study may inspire teachers and educators to use literature that mirrors their students’ worlds (Bishop, 1990) and to create culturally sustaining spaces (Paris, 2012) where students can engage in discussions about issues that are more meaningful to them (Vasquez, Janks, & Comber, 2019).

The purpose of this study was to learn more about Arabic-speaking students’ engagement with literature that mirrors their lives in an elementary public school in the United States. I studied a group of first and second grade (rising second and third grade) students’ engagement with literature about the Middle East across multiple contexts for 14 months. I was interested in finding out what students choose to share when they are in the culturally sustaining context where all members are from Arab countries, as well as when they are in their grade level and ENL classrooms and reading literature about the Middle East with their teachers. I engaged in practitioner research that helped me to be “a more complete teacher” (Shagoury & Miller, 2012) in the culturally sustaining context where I examined my instructional practices and the focal
students’ engagement. The read-alouds in this setting were informed by culturally sustaining pedagogy, translanguaging, and transactional theories of response.

The focal students shared differently across multiple contexts. They were animated in the culturally sustaining context, and less animated in their classrooms. They did not “author” their own lives in the grade-level and ENL classrooms, rarely sharing information about their families and lives. Sometimes they were content with only raising their hands or nodding their face to answer their teacher’s questions, and when they shared their brief responses, they did not elaborate or extend. Although they shared mostly one-word answers in the grade-level classroom and ENL contexts, they did show engagement through listening, smiling, repeating some words to themselves, and silently dramatizing their responses. The focal students shared more in the culturally sustaining context. They actively shared their dramatizations, questions, and predictions, using their comfortable language(s). They engaged in naming their reality through questioning the text and the world (Freire, 2000).

Three students provided the basis for detailed portraits of literary engagement across multiple contexts. The presence of literature about the Middle East encouraged Mai to teach aspects of her culture through verbal and written responses to the literature. Mai shared her culture, religion, and language as she connected to her milieus (Brooks & Browne, 2012). The second portrait involved Yan, a boy with unique responses to literature. Yan’s responses and engagement with literature worked at redefining connections and disconnections to literature (Jones, Clarke, & Enriquez, 2010). While Mai lived through the literature through stepping in the characters’ shoes, Ziad lived through the literature through questioning the world based on his backgrounds (Souto-Manning, 2009; Lewison, Leland, & Harste, 2015). While Mai and Ziad often shared their language, culture, and religion, Yan shared about his family, favorite animals,
and video games. All three brought their understanding of their out-of-school life into the literature discussion. Yan and Ziad often engaged in problematizing the authors and the illustrators’ choices (Osorio, 2018).

As the focal students saw themselves reflected in books at school, they were being told in one of the most powerful ways that their experience is valuable, their culture is valuable, and their language is valuable (Bishop, 1990). As educators, it is crucial to explore, value, and then sustain the students’ different ways of knowing, being, and doing (Paris & Alim, 2012). This study supports previous studies that explored the power of including diverse books (Möller, 2014; Short, 2009; Wissman et al., 2017).

**Culturally Sustaining Read-Aloud as a Way for Humanizing Pedagogy**

This study asserts that reading diverse literature should be combined with culturally sustaining pedagogy. Engaging in culturally sustaining read-aloud is a form of humanizing pedagogy. Humanizing pedagogy is a liberating pedagogy that aims to “transform existing power and privilege in the service of greater social justice and human freedom” (McLaren, 1997, p. 46, as cited in Salazar, 2013). Blurring the teacher and student roles is necessary for humanizing pedagogy (Osorio, 2018).

This study suggests that diverse literature is best used in a learning community where discussion is encouraged and viewed as a critical part of learning. Thus, the discussion must come from within the students’ familiar worlds. The teachers’ role is to animate such discussion (May, 2011). By animation, May (2011) means that “when a teacher repeats something a student has just said, the teacher serves as an animator, and the student serves as the author” (p. 8). Throughout the study, I (and sometimes the teachers) animated the students’ talk by restating what they said and then asking students to elaborate. The literature in the study invited the
students to draw on their funds of knowledge (Gonzalez, Moll, & Amanti, 2005) to support their understandings and predictions of the texts (Pinnell, 2001). The social construction in the culturally sustaining context was a key that facilitated the students’ engagement in the interactive read-aloud (Sipe, 2000). The literature was an agent for socialization (Sipe, 1999). In the culturally sustaining context, focal students explored each other’s lifestyle and culture (e.g., unique foods and mosques they go to). In this study, students were positioned as knowers (May, 2011). They led the discussion by sharing their connections and predictions. Such an interactive environment is aligned with May’s (2011) view that “effective teaching called for less teacher talk and more student talk” (p. 28). The way we, educators, make a free space for students to talk and interact during literature discussion is a crucial component to humanizing pedagogy.

**Freedom Space**

Freedom space is based on active and social interaction and interaction with the world. Students can interact freely with each other, their teachers, books, and the world. Freedom space is an empowering space that encourages students to be fully themselves. In the culturally sustaining context, I made a conscious decision as I read with my students: I let them lead, I listened to them, I encouraged them to think critically through asking open-ended questions (e.g., what are your thoughts? what are your feelings? tell us more about that? and what makes you think of that?) (Vasquez, 2014, 2017). The literature in the study was a powerful way to invite students to share their stories (Moller & Allen, 2000; Osorio, 2018). The students’ discourse described in the culturally sustaining context represented a democratic community where all members had a voice. The students were not positioned as recipients of knowledge from the teacher and texts. Instead, they questioned, critiqued, and spoke back to the ideologies in texts and discussions. The students engaged in empowering talk where interactions were valued and
supported. The culturally sustaining context was an empowering space where the focal students engaged in critical discussions to project their voices and read the world (Freire & Macedo, 1987; Janks, 2014).

Throughout the research study, multimodal responses to literature such as writings, drawings, and dramatizations deepened students’ discussions and reflections (Adomat, 2012). During the read-alouds, students entered the world of the story and pretended the characters were alive as they spoke to them and imagined their reactions (Rosenblatt, 1978; Sipe, 2008). They saw themselves in the stories (Quiroa, 2011). They acted out their feelings by moving around and jumping (Sipe, 2008; Adomat, 2012). Sometimes they connected to other texts by connecting the stories’ plots and characters (Sipe, 2008), and sometimes they proposed their own endings (Vasquez, 2014; Botelho & Rudman, 2009). Importantly, we all enjoyed the experience. Literature discussion should be a way of enjoyment.

Freedom, then, is a means for a meaningful read-aloud discussion (Dewey, 1938/1997). By freedom, I mean freedom of thoughts and movements. The amount of freedom played an intrinsic role in the focal students’ responses throughout the multiple contexts. The classrooms’ pattern of organization and instruction impacted the interaction or collaboration among the students. Freedom entails establishing a naturalistic environment where students become spontaneous. In freedom spaces, students feel that they are part of the classroom community. Indeed, having strict or static rules does not support social and critical learning, and leads to a disconnection between school and society. This disconnection between school and reality could diminish the students’ freedom. Therefore, we do not need to isolate life from school since it is a part of it (Dewey, 2001). When school is isolated from life, students will not know how to learn unless they are experiencing it. As humans, we tend to draw on our past experiences to make
sense of the new experiences. When teachers view the read-aloud experience as facts that need to be given to the students, they take away their own and their students’ right to be free and human (Dewey, 1997). Therefore, teachers could empower and free themselves by being self-aware which requires self-reflection. Through reflection, they could name the forces that seem to determine from without (Dewey, 1933/1998). These forces make them act without wondering, judging, identifying purposes, and naming the world. These forces could be, for example, when teachers adhere to their own cultural perspectives about teaching or when they draw on the preexisting knowledge that makes them teach the way they have been taught. Therefore, knowledge should not be treated as a “static” or “finished product” (Dewey, 1938/1997, p. 19); instead, the teacher could engage in critical and conscious reflection to reconstruct liberated and humanized pedagogy (Freire, 1970/2011).

Figure 4 is an attempt to help educators think about how they can create a free read-aloud space that is more student-centered through adapting their positioning and practices in the classrooms to view their students’ cultural background as an asset rather than as a barrier.

**Figure 4**

*Freedom Space*
Implications for Theory

This study adds to the existing body of knowledge on interactive, critical, and culturally sustaining read-alouds. My tri-part theoretical framework helped shape my practices and decisions as I designed my research and explored my focal students’ engagement in the read-alouds. Culturally sustaining pedagogy, transactional theories of response, and translanguaging highlight the importance of searching for books that are relevant to the students’ cultural backgrounds, inviting students’ cultural and linguistic repertoires, and listening to their responses so I could incorporate that into my instructional plan. These frameworks supported my discussion of how students responded to books, how they drew on their linguistic and cultural resources, and how the books served as mirrors. Given that the frameworks overlap and support each other, they helped me make sense of the data throughout the collection, analysis, and writing process.

The field lacks studies that use multiple theories to frame studies of young Arabic-speaking or Middle Eastern students in the United States. As culturally sustaining pedagogy seeks to promote students’ funds of knowledge, including their cultural and linguistic repertoires (Paris, 2012), future research in this area would be valuable especially for ENL and ELA teachers. This study also brings more attention to translanguaging in classrooms. Future research within response to literature could draw on this theoretical framework and ask how teachers facilitate translanguaging in their classrooms and what influences the students to engage in translanguaging practices.

The study contributes to the discussion of students’ responses and engagement with literature. It suggests that attention to disconnections-making is a way to support critical engagement with texts (Jones & Clarke, 2007; Jones, Clarke, & Enriquez, 2010). It also suggests
that culturally sustaining practices can welcome students and honor their contemporary cultural and linguistic practices (Paris & Alim, 2014).

**Implications for Research**

The findings of this research study could support the current understandings of diverse books and read-aloud discussions in culturally and linguistically diverse elementary classrooms. The present study extends the research conversation of Middle Eastern students’ responses to literature about the Middle East in multiple contexts. It also extends our knowledge of freedom spaces. It suggests some implications for future research. Future studies should consider looking across multiple contexts to explore students’ engagement. More longitudinal studies need to be conducted to understand how Middle Eastern refugee students navigate their identities when reading diverse books in mainstream classrooms. How do they interact with their mainstream peers? What do they share? How do they facilitate culturally specific lexicons? And what is the impact of including such literature on their involvement, motivation, and achievement within the school and out-of-school contexts? Additionally, this study only investigated Arabic-speaking students’ engagement with literature that mirrors their lives. For future research, it is recommended to include other cultural groups and from different grade levels to participate.

Since it is crucial to listen and value all voices in the classroom, more investigations need to be conducted in multicultural and multilingual classrooms to explore how the read-aloud experience could be a way to share differences and similarities. In this study, I could not gain permission from all English-speaking students; therefore, their voices were missing. I also could not include the Arabic-speaking students’ parents in the read-alouds due to their availability; therefore, exploring parents’ responses to the literature would also provide insightful
perspectives to the field. Future research might consider inviting parents during the read-alouds to join and participate in multimodal responses to literature with their children.

As demonstrated in the study, young children do not always stay on one topic. Sometimes they speak about critical issues, and then quickly move on to other issues that capture their attention. More investigations need to be conducted with older Arabic-speaking or Middle Eastern students engaging in read-aloud of diverse books. Also, the analysis of the focal students’ use of language should be pursued further in a future study since it is not a central focus of this dissertation, but it is an important aspect.

**Implications for Practice**

As Arabic-speaking students need to see themselves reflected in books, the study suggests a need for educators to incorporate literature about the Middle East into their classrooms. Classroom libraries, as well as school libraries, should include high-quality literature about the Middle East. Teachers ought to know about their students before using any texts (Amanti, 2005) and need to choose and share books that carry appropriate and accurate information. Since cultures are not fixed, they cannot base their choices on what they see in media; they need to look for the deep cultural values and practices for their students’ actual lives. Drawing on Harris (1996) and Taxel (1997), Short and Fox (2004) discuss that all students have “the right to see themselves within a book, to find within a book the truth of their own experiences instead of stereotypes and misrepresentations” (p. 381). Therefore, researchers suggest drawing on criteria and guidelines when choosing literature about the Middle East (Al-Hazza & Bucher, 2008; Al-Hazza & Lucking, 2007). For example, recent texts tend to be more accurate in evoking authentic information (Al-Hazza & Lucking, 2007). It is significant to
consider that “no single book should be relied on as the sole source of information about any country or culture” (Lechner, 2007, p. 1).

Using multiple texts to offer different perspectives is not enough; teachers “must be critical of the ways, even within multicultural literature, that single stories get taken up, circulated, reinforced, resisted, or challenged” (Tschida, Ryan, & Ticknor, 2014, p. 32). The representation in literature has the power to shape the students’ understanding of who is valuable and who is not (Tschida, Ryan, & Ticknor, 2014). Therefore, teachers are encouraged to use the critical multicultural analysis lens when selecting, reading, and discussing texts with their students (Botelho & Rudman, 2009). They could study and assess the “story’s perspective and determine whether feelings are celebrated or exploited” (Louie, 2006, p. 438). Without the critical multicultural analysis lens, teachers and students might understand the foreign culture from a ‘single’ and misrepresented story.

How the teachers approached their read-aloud in this study impacted the nature and quality of the students’ responses. While it is important to value our students’ cultural beliefs and practices through providing diverse books that reflect diverse students’ identities, establishing a freedom space is even more critical. Using diverse books should be combined with responsive literacy instruction. When teachers viewed learning as an acquisition of skills, students became brief and communicated less because the focus was on comprehending the text not engaging in a dialogic discussion about it. The role of instruction is central in any read-aloud discussion. Therefore, teachers could focus on how they approach the read-alouds. Providing a freedom space requires teachers to take a curious stance and be mindful. In free read-aloud spaces, teachers could focus on listening empathetically and actively and creating a welcoming and safe environment.
This study encourages teachers to build on students’ responses to literature by extending on what they say through requests (such as, say more and tell me more). Showing interest in what students have shared (such as, nodding, smiling, saying “mmm,” and maintaining eye contact) and helping students connect to their lives through open-ended questions can enhance their agency and identity. As the research study demonstrated, when the teachers used the focal students as resources and invited them to share more about their lives, the students became more confident sharing their cultural and linguistic repertoires. It is crucial to connect learning to the students’ real lives because it is part of their identities (Delpit, 2012). Thus, teachers could stop and listen to their students’ cultural identity and embrace humanizing pedagogical practices (Osorio, 2018) to set up a valued and respected multicultural environment. In doing so, teachers will establish a natural and flexible relationship with their students and listen to their spontaneous discussions.

This study indicates a need to engage in dialogic discussions within classrooms by establishing a student-centered classroom based on reciprocal relations. As Dewey (1938/1997) remarks, “the development occurs through reciprocal give-and-take, the teacher taking but not being afraid also to give” (p. 72). Therefore, in order to make learning more purposeful, teachers are encouraged to balance between freedom and guidance by considering students’ natural impulses and experiences and, collaboratively, guiding them into broader future experiences (Dewey, 1938/1997). Researchers indicate that much learning occurs through interaction between teachers and learners (Hamre at al., 2013). When teachers want their students to learn about one culture, and there is at least one student who is from that culture, they might take the opportunity and use this student as a resource. However, it is essential to consider if singling out a student like this might embarrass him or her. Thus, sometimes students do not want their
differences noted, especially in front of their peers. Therefore, finding out more from the student through writing or home visits would certainly be beneficial.

Connecting with families can enhance the teacher’s knowledge about the students’ cultural backgrounds. Teachers could invite families into classrooms and share positive news with them about their children. Sharing with families is an intrinsic way of welcoming them. Teachers could share data with parents and ask for their thoughts. Freedom space is essential when involving families because, like their children, they want to feel that they are part of the classroom community. Therefore, both freedom space and family engagement are connected and can support each other.

When the teachers in this study appreciated the diversity in their classrooms, the focal students became more willing to open-up and share details about their cultural practices. As schools (and society) send the message that the English language is the only valued and accepted language, bilinguals might not have the opportunity to be their authentic selves (Osorio, 2020). Therefore, teachers have an intrinsic role in establishing a responsive and welcoming environment that listens to all voices and accepts diversity. Through such an environment, “students are taught to be proud of their ethnic identities and cultural backgrounds instead of being apologetic or ashamed of them” (Gay, 2018, p. 42). The more the teacher became interested in her students’ background, the more the students became willing to participate in the classroom literary discussions.

Yan’s portrait illustrates how it is easier for teachers to simply assume their students’ making disconnections and blaming them for not paying attention, while they might be deeply engaged (Jones & Clarke, 2007). Yan’s connection with the video game in the *Golden Domes and Silver Lanterns* (Khan, 2012) could be further explored and validated as relevant responses.
that benefit both the teacher and students. Thus, Ms. Nancy could ask questions like what makes you think of that? or tell me more about it? to explore his engagement. As Delpit (2006) encourages educators to explore their students’ needs and “appreciate and make use of the higher order knowledge that they bring from home” (p. 228). This portrait shows that teachers need to be mindful. Students in this study from the Middle East engaged with literature in a range of ways. Each person drew on his/her unique background. A personal understanding of any text (oral or written) is mediated by sociocultural surroundings (Bakhtin, 1998). Therefore, teachers play an essential role in positioning the read-aloud experience as a way to learn about their students and promote their engagement with literature.

Throughout the study, the focal students built their understanding based on the existing facts and experiences they have grabbed from everyday live interactions and knowledge. Their responses to literature reflect that “nothing can be developed from nothing” (Dewey, 2001, p. 114). The students were consciously looking at what was available in their world and then drawing connections to, hopefully, make meaning. When the teachers used their students’ real lives, their instruction around the read-alouds became more effective and relevant. The more they welcomed and valued their students’ funds of knowledge (González, Moll, & Amanti, 2005), the more the students became confident in themselves and their backgrounds.

The results of this study advocate for creating possibilities for the young ENL learners to engage in critical discussions. When engaging in read-aloud discussions, teachers are encouraged to have the students take the lead. They could listen to their students’ responses “to know how they are problematizing their world” (Vasquez, Janks, & Comber, 2019, p. 306). Through a critical reading of literature, students begin to critique the texts and their authors and illustrators as well as their world; thus, they engage in a discussion where they could be an advocate for a
more peaceful society (Ryan & Hermann-Wilmarth, 2018). As the research study demonstrated, when the students took the lead in the culturally sustaining context, they actively engaged in dramatization, questioned the texts and the world, and provided suggestions and alternatives. As Monobe and Son (2014) rightly underline, “by giving the students opportunities to commit to problem solving through drama, teachers can create a powerful space for children to become global citizens and hopefully transform the world into a better place for all people” (pp. 73-74). Notably, the read-aloud experience should be exciting and welcoming for the students (and the teacher), not an assignment that needs to be completed.

This study shows multiple ways to promote small group literature discussion. It encourages teachers to value all students’ responses, even the disconnections that we usually ignore. Teachers could decrease their authority and enjoy the experience so students could join in reading the text, touching the book, and moving around. Students need to have more time looking at the illustration as they talk about it and engage in the meaning-making process. As the students talk, teachers also could engage in the discussion as learners. They do not need to direct the discussion to specific issues but build on the students’ responses (Osorio, 2018).

Dewey (1933) rightly states that “textbooks must be used as means and tools, not as ends” (p. 264). The read-aloud instruction should focus on using the book as a tool that helps the students to critically explore, connect, and reflect (Osorio, 2018). When the teachers in the study controlled the talk by asking closed-ended questions and directing the students’ attention to aspects in texts, the students became brief and responded with one word. Such questions could limit students’ engagement (Lewis, 2000). The students did not have the chance to engage in free discussion because the book was treated as an end. Thus, the teachers sometimes were interrupting their students lived-through experience. Such questions, because they were the
teacher’s and not the students’, encouraged separation rather than the connection between the classroom and society. Therefore, most of the focal students lived through the text silently through speaking to themselves and engaging in silent dramatizations.

Fostering culturally sustaining pedagogy and critical literacy read-aloud experiences necessitates professional development for teachers. Some teachers are not sure how to use books that have sensitive components like war (Riley & Crawford-Garrett, 2016), while others read these books in question-answer format because they do not want to complicate their comfort zone (Dutro, 2008). As the research study demonstrated, some teachers believe these books, such as Nasreen’s Secret School (Winter, 2009) and Librarian of Basra (Winter, 2005), were “heavy books” and not suitable for children. Therefore, some teachers did not recommend using them because they did not “want to bring sad memories to their students.” Therefore, teacher preparation programs need to prepare current and future teachers to engage in critical discussions on “heavy books.” Teachers could engage in professional learning communities where they could reflect on their practices, listen to alternatives, and examine their students’ artifacts (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009). As Fanning and Schmidt (2007) beautifully stated, “open yourself to your students, your classroom to your colleagues, [and] your students to their world” (p. 35). Thus, teachers are encouraged to build relationships with students, parents, communities, and academic communities because working together leads to more knowledge construction. As Freire (1970) writes, “Knowledge emerges only through invention and re-invention, through the restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry human beings pursue in the world, with the world, and with each other” (p. 72). Teachers could create more meaningful spaces through emancipatory pedagogy to empower and engage all students and help them notice and critique the world around them instead of positioning them as consumers of knowledge.
**Limitations**

This study can add to the field to inform research and practice. However, the findings of this research are not generalizable to the broader early childhood field, Arabic-speaking students, or any other cultural groups due to the sample size and demographic. The study was conducted with a particular set of students in a particular school. The Arabic-speaking students in this study interacted with literature about the Middle East across multiple contexts within the school. Also, each child is unique in her/his interest, knowledge, and experience; therefore, while this study could be adopted in different classroom contexts, the findings would differ based on participant students’ background experience, their teachers’ teaching philosophy, and the availability of Middle Eastern literature within a school.

I used the term ENL only for the purpose of this study. As this study has multiple contexts, I thought it would cause some confusion to refer to the ENL classroom as bilingual. *Emergent bilingual* (Garcia, 2009) is a more positive term that focuses on what is there rather than what is missing. Through using this term, “educators would be building from the students’ strengths—their home language and cultural practices” (Garcia, 2009, p. 323). While this study calls for the need to welcome students’ backgrounds, labeling students as ENL contradicts the study’s purpose. As the focal students are becoming bilingual, referring to them as emergent bilinguals is more relevant.

**Significance of the Study**

The research study is beneficial for the broader educational field to extend the call to include diverse books and create freedom spaces that invite all voices. It provides a descriptive account for teachers in diverse classrooms through voicing Arabic-speaking students’ engagement when interacting with texts that mirror their lives. Furthermore, the study illustrates
that bringing a culturally sustaining lens to the sharing of diverse books is equally as important as having a selection of diverse books available. Educators could consider the possibility and the richness of incorporating books about the students’ lives in classrooms. They could consider how interactive discussions around diverse books can provide opportunities for students to engage in a critical and reflective environment. They also could notice the importance of learning about students’ out-of-school lives through connecting with families. Students (and their families) who see the inclusion of books about their cultural background could feel welcomed and connected to the school community. Students who see reflections of themselves in books they read in school could also feel valued. Such books could encourage the students to voice their own thoughts and confidently share their lives. The results of this research study call for a concrete reform in education and social environments.

**Conclusion**

The Arabic-speaking students’ engagement in read-alouds across the multiple contexts described in this dissertation suggests the possibilities of constructing a less constrained classroom space. This space should help students connect to past and present experiences, as well as open doors to new experiences and discoveries. Therefore, it is crucial to establish student-centered classrooms where activities and discussions come from within the students’ familiar worlds. Importantly, learning should not stop there; instead, teachers could co-construct (with students) interactive experiences that deepen and extend the students’ knowledge and growth (Dewey, 1938). Before incorporating books that mirror students’ culture and background, there is a need for us, as educators, to be bridge makers for our students’ past, present, and future experiences. Students do not only need to see themselves in books, they also benefit from a freedom space where they could be fully themselves.
This study suggests a need to rethink practice and reconsider the role of schools in establishing a democratic community. I hope that this research study offers awareness for educators to recognize marginalized students and their experiences in classrooms (Dewey, 1938) and establish a democratic and interactive environment that listens to all voices and, in turn, promotes humanness. The idea is not merely to passively read-aloud books that mirror students’ lives to students but also to establish a critical context that prepares global citizenry. Sharing personal experiences in classrooms is required to advocate for global citizenry. Certainly, it is time to think about what is missing in classrooms that lead immigrant and marginalized students to suffer the separation between the school and society. What are the constraints that thwart us to realize what is best for our world, and what does it mean to live and teach democratically?
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https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2020.102271


University of Arizona.


Zoch, M. (2017). “It’s important for them to know who they are”: Teachers’ efforts to sustain students’ cultural competence in an age of high-stakes testing. Urban Education, 52(5), 610–636. https://doi.org/10.1177/0042085915618716

Children’s Literature Cited


Appendix A

Annotated Bibliography of Selected Picturebooks


Bunting (2006) tells the story of Farah, the new student in the school, who came from another country and does not speak English. On a field trip to an apple orchard, Farah starts to observe things similar to her own life which makes her more comfortable. This book makes readers feel more comfortable in a new environment.


This story sets in Mauritania where women dress a malafa, a long dress to cover head and cloths. Lalla wants to wear the malafa, like her mom and the women around her. Women wear the malafa, not for beauty or mystery, for faith. Lalla got a malafa after she told her mom that she needs one so she can pray.


It is informational book that presents beautiful photographs of real Muslims celebrating Ramadan and Eid Al-Fitr around the world. During the month of Ramadan, Muslims engage in multiple religious activities such as reading Quran and giving charity. They celebrate this month and Eid with their family and community.

Salam Alaikum, peace be upon you, is how Muslims greet each other. This picture book aims to celebrate peace, kindness, and happiness throughout the world. The more people become compassionate with each other, the more their community become brighter and stronger.


Tells the story of a young boy as he observes Ramadan with his family. He learns the meaning of different practices.


It is a colorful book that shows the beauty and traditions of Muslims. Young readers can learn about clothing, food, and some elements of Islamic culture such as prayer rug, hijab, and mosque.


It tells the story of Rubina who was excited that she had been invited to a birthday party. Rubina ran all the way to tell her mom, Ami. Ami asks, why people celebrate birthdays, as her culture does not. Ami insists that she takes her younger sister, Sana, with her. Sana ate all the candies. She also ate Rubina’s lollipop. Years later, When Sana gets invited to a birthday party and her mom insists that she take her younger sister, Maryam, with her. Rubina tells their mom to let Sana go by herself. Their mom agrees. After the party, Sana brought a big lollipop as a gift to Rubina.

It tells the story of Yasmeen who celebrates the Muslim holidays of Ramadan and Eid with her family and community. This story reflects modern Muslim culture.


It tells the story of an Iraqi family who forced to flee home. They carry their cat with them from Iraq to Greece. During the crowded boat crossing to Greece, the cat runs away. The family has to continue their journey, leaving their cat. A few days later, the family finds their cat in Greece.


The story tells the story of Leena who attends her friend’s birthday party during Ramadan. She has lots of fun, even though she does not eat or drink. Finally, the time comes to break her fast and enjoy eating with her family.


As in Khan’s (2008) *Night of the Moon*, this story illustrates a Muslim family during the month of Ramadan. A girl explains how her family observes Ramadan as they engage in praying and reading the Quran. The illustrator depicts the multiple phases of the moon.


It is a story of Baghdad during the 2003 war. James Rumford is the author and the illustrator, and he is well known for his passion to know about different cultures and languages.
He lived in different places in the Middle East and learned about Arabic calligraphy. Rumford wants to call for peace and to illuminate positive issues in that culture. *Silent Music* tells the story of a boy named Ali, who lives in Baghdad. While he lives in a hard time between the war threat and his country reestablishment, he finds his way to enjoy his hobbies of playing soccer, dancing, listening to loud music, and calligraphy. He was inspired by Yaqut Musta’simi, a calligrapher. Ali finds joy and comfort in writing as he says about his calligraphy: “I love make the ink flow-from my pen stopping and starting, gliding and sweeping, leaping, dancing to the silent music in my head”.


The story tells the story of a refugee family’s journey. It is a picture book that illustrates a Syrian family who is forced to flee their village to escape the war. It shows the curiosity of arriving at a new home. It is art work that tells the story without texts and facial expressions.


This story depicts any refugee family who leaves their homeland to escape from the war. It beautifully illustrates the family’s emotions throughout their journey as they travel by foot, bicycle, boat, truck, car, and train.

Khimar is another word for hijab. This story illustrates how a young Muslim girl enjoys playing dress up with her mother’s colorful hijabs. This lively picture book is a mirror for interfaith families.


The story depicts a family who practices their faith as they engage in different activities such as fasting, preparing meals, praying at the mosque, and visiting friends and relatives.


Jeanette Winter’s (2009) tells the story of a young Afghani girl, Nasreen, who lived a safe life with her mother, father, and grandmother. Until the time of the Taliban who controlled Afghanistan and deprived women of their right to live a normal life and to be educated. Her father was taken by the Taliban and her mother went to search for him. Nasreen lives with her grandmother, suffering the absence of her parents. She felt sad, depressed, and lonely. Her grandmother helped her and took her to a secret school. She started to go to this school secretly until she found a life in learning and reading books. She started to make friends and learn. Her grandmother acknowledges the importance of education. This book is based on a true story that shows what happened with Nasreen and other girls alike in the time of the Taliban’s regime.


It is based on a true story of a woman called, Alia Muhamad Baker, who saved 30,000 books by moving them to a safer place in her house right before the library burned. Her library
was a place where both males and females gathered to talk about books and life. Until the time of the British invasion which made these people talk about war, soldiers, death, and survival. Alia’s mission was to save these books before they get damaged from the war. She held these books in her home waiting for peace and dreaming of building a new library.
Appendix B

Teacher Consent

Institutional Review Board (IRB)

Informed Consent Information for Participation in a Research Study

(Teacher’s Consent)

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<td>Study Principal Investigator Email address</td>
<td><a href="mailto:aaldaej@albany.edu">aaldaej@albany.edu</a></td>
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Introduction

You are being asked to participate in this study because some students in your school/classroom are from the Middle East and this is the central focus of the research.

Why is this study being done?

This study seeks to understand the impact of interactive read-alouds of children’s literature that reflects the Middle East world on Middle Eastern students’ participations.

What are the study procedures? What will I be asked to do?

This study will be conducted at [Specify location if necessary]. This study will require data collection in the form of interviews, interactive read-alouds, artifacts (drawings or written responses), field notes, and observations. This study will be conducted in a group setting.

The data will be collected over six months, (pending IRB approval) (approximately, two or three days a week).

After I receive the ELA and ENL teachers and the principal's consents via email, I will email the parental consent and students assent forms to the ENL teacher. The ENL teacher at the school will pass out parental consent and student assent forms to the focal students. After receiving assent and parent consent, I will start my observations.

Children:

• During the first 2 weeks, I will observe participant students during break times and recess. I will observe the participants’ classrooms (3 ELA and 1 ENL) during any interactive reading (at least three times a week) to get a general sense of how they usually respond to literature. The
observation will not take more than one hour. I will take field notes of only participant students' verbal and nonverbal interactions and their teachers (using paper and pen), but will not audio or video-record these notes and will not record any data from other students during these observations. I will conduct an open-ended interview with the participant students to know about their interests and needs, and to establish a friendly relationship. The interview will last for 30 minutes (within one school period). The interview will be audio recorded with a digital voice recorder, with permission.

- I will observe the children's classrooms when their teachers read aloud children's literature about the Middle East. The observation will last approximately for 30 minutes (for 6-8 weeks). (Note: I will observe 4 classrooms-3 ELA and 1 ENL, all the focal students who are in different grades "2nd and 3rd" will be together during the ENL classroom).

- I will read and discuss a children's book that reflects the Middle East with the participant students (30-50 minutes) once a week for one month. This will be conducted in a group setting (during normal school day). Students will be asked to respect the privacy of other members in the group by not revealing anything they have learned about other members. As I read with the students, I will invite them to share their thoughts and connections to the book and life. During another day, the students will continue discussing the book that they read earlier in the week (20 minutes). They may share their favorite part/s in the story and talk about the previous books that they read. The students will be invited to write or/and draw their thoughts about the book and their lives (15 minutes). I will provide papers, pencils, and colored pencils. Then, the students will talk about their artifacts (15 minutes). I will photo-copy the students' artifacts, students can keep the originals. Students can speak/write in Arabic and/or English. The students' discussions will be audio recorded, with permission.

- I will also conduct some interviews (2-3) with the participant students (30 minutes). The interviews will be open ended where participants can share their views about the books or anything relevant to the study. The interviews will be conducted in Arabic or/and English. They will be audio recorded, with permission.

**It is not anticipated students in the class will perceive anything out of the ordinary when participant students gather for the research. It is common for students to leave for additional programs at the school (such as ENL tutoring). This research will not interrupt the other programs and classroom instruction.

I will consult with the students' teachers to find a time when I am able to speak with the participant students for the research that will not interrupt normal educational activities. The research will be conducted at the school in a place identified by an administrator as private and quiet (e.g. the library). The students will be notified by their teachers of the interview place. Students will be offered options to speak in Arabic or/and in English.

Teachers:
• I will share children's books about the Middle East (see attached description of books) with the teachers.

• I will observe the teachers' interactive read-aloud of children's literature about the Middle East in the whole classroom setting (3 ELA classrooms and 1 ENL setting). I will take field notes of participant students' verbal and nonverbal interactions and their teacher's approach when reading and engaging the students, but will not audio or video-record these notes and will not record any data from other students during these observations. The observation will last approximately for 30 minutes (for 6-8 weeks).

• I will conduct an open-ended interview with the teachers individually (30 minutes, within one school period) to know about their thoughts in regards to the participant students' engagements as well as to explore their views of the incorporation of multicultural literature. The interview will be audio recorded, with permission.

**How long will it take?**

The study will take 6 months. I will visit the school approximately 2-3 times a week. Each visit will last 30-60 minutes.

**What are the risks or inconveniences of the study?**

The study examines Arabic speaking students' experience of reading and talking about books that reflect their world and should involve no risks, as the confidentiality of the interviewees will be carefully maintained. Besides the interviews, classroom observations, and asking/planning for a time and place to meet with students, I will not take any other of your or other employee’s time. This study will focus on the participant Arabic speaking students and their ELA and ENL teachers. It will also include some data from the participant students’ families. It will not include any information about other students or any member in your school.

**What are the benefits of the study?**

Student participants will have the opportunity to reflect and talk about books and project their voices through a close collaboration and interaction. Participants usually find that they are empowered in the process, as their experiences are acknowledged and valued. This study will provide discussions and recommendations on teaching of reading to Middle Eastern students, which has received less attention at the current elementary level education. I will be happy to share these findings with you and other teachers in your school.

**How will my personal information be protected?**

All individuals in the study will be given pseudonyms in the data collection process. The school name will be given a pseudonym as well. Documents that link the pseudonyms to individuals' identifying information will be stored on password-protected computers and destroyed after the completion of data analysis. All materials that could be linked to individuals will be destroyed after the completion of this study.
The study will take 6 months. I will visit the school approximately 2-3 times a week. Each visit will last 30-60 minutes.

**What are the risks or inconveniences of the study?**

The study examines Arabic speaking students' experience of reading and talking about books that reflect their world and should involve no risks, as the confidentiality of the interviewees will be carefully maintained. Besides asking for a time and place to meet with students, I will not take any other of your or other employee’s time. This study will focus on the participant Arabic speaking students and their ELA and ENL teachers. It will also include some data from the participant students’ families. It will not include any information about other students or any member in your school.

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**How will my personal information be protected?**

All individuals in the study will be given pseudonyms in the data collection process. The name of the school will be given pseudonyms as well. Documents that link the pseudonyms to individuals' identifying information will be stored on password-protected computers and destroyed after the completion of data analysis. All materials that could be linked to individuals will be destroyed after the completion of this study.

All information obtained in this study is strictly confidential unless disclosure is required by law. In addition, the Institutional Review Board and the University or government officials responsible for monitoring this study may inspect these records.

**Can participants stop being in the study and what are their rights?**

Participation in the research is entirely voluntary. Even after participants agree to participate in the research, they may decide to leave the study at any time. Students may choose to not participate in the study at any time even if their parents consent to their participation.

**Whom do I contact if I have questions about the study?**

Take as long as you like before you make a decision. I will be happy to answer any question you have about this study. If you have further questions about this project or if you have a research-related problem, you may contact me or my advisor, Dr. Kelly Wiseman (kwiseman@albany.edu).
All information obtained in this study is strictly confidential unless disclosure is required by law. In addition, the Institutional Review Board, the sponsor of the study (e.g., NIH, FDA, etc.) and University or government officials responsible for monitoring this study may inspect these records.

**Can I stop being in the study and what are my rights?**

Participation in the research is entirely voluntary. Even after participants agree to participate in the research, they may decide to leave the study at any time. Students may choose to not participate in the study at any time even if their parents consent to their participation.

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Take as long as you like before you make a decision. I will be happy to answer any question you have about this study. If you have further questions about this project or if you have a research-related problem, you may contact me or my advisor, Dr. Kelly Wiseman (kswiseman@albany.edu).

**Whom do I contact if I have questions about my rights as a study participant?**

Research at the University Albany involving human participants is carried out under the oversight of the Institutional Review Board (IRB). This research has been reviewed and approved by the IRB. If you have any questions concerning your rights as a research subject or if you wish to report any concerns about the study, you may contact University at Albany Office of Pre-Award and Compliance Services at 1-866-857-5459 or beconcerns@albany.edu.

I understand the information above regarding the research that will be conducted in my school, ________________________________, for 6 months.

I do / do not __ give my permission for you to observe and interview my participant students and to have their artifacts.

I do / do not __ give my permission to have my participant students audio-recorded during the interviews, and the group setting.

I do / do not __ give my permission for you to interview me and observe my classroom.

I do / do not __ give my permission for you to audio-record my interviews.

**Teacher name (printed)** ______________________________

**Teacher signature** ________________________________ **Date** ________________
### Appendix C

#### Principal Consent

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<td><a href="mailto:aldaj@albany.edu">aldaj@albany.edu</a></td>
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I am seeking your permission to conduct my research at [ ] because some students in this school are originally from the Middle East and this is the central focus of the research.

**Why is this study being done?**

This study seeks to understand the impact of interactive read-alouds of children's literature that reflects the Middle East on Middle Eastern students.

**What are the study procedures? What will I be asked to do?**

This study will require data collection in the form of interviews, interactive read-alouds, artifacts (drawings or/and written responses), field notes, and observations. This study will be conducted in a group setting:

- The data will be collected over six months, (pending IRB approval) (approximately, two or three days a week).
- After I receive the ELA and ENL teachers’ consents via email, I will email the parental consent and students assent forms to the ENL teacher. The ENL teacher at the school will pass out parental consent and student assent forms to the focal students. After receiving assent and parent consent, I will start my observations.

**Children:**

- During the first 2 weeks, I will observe participant students during break times and recess. I will observe the participants’ classrooms (3 ELA and 1 ENL) during any interactive reading (at least three times a week) to get a general sense of how they usually respond to literature. The observation will not take more than one hour. I will take field notes of only participant students' verbal and nonverbal interactions and their teachers (using paper and pen), but will not audio or video-record these notes and will not record any data from other students during these observations. I will conduct an open-ended interview with the participant students to know about their interests and needs, and to establish a friendly relationship. The interview will last for 30 minutes (within one school period). The interview will be audio recorded with a digital voice recorder, with permission.
Informed Consent Information for Participation in a Research Study

- I will observe the children's classrooms when their teachers read aloud children's literature about the Middle East. The observation will last approximately 30 minutes (for 6-8 weeks). (Note: I will observe 4 classrooms: 3 ELA and 1 ENL, all the focal students who are in different grades 1st, 2nd, and 3rd will be together during the ENL classroom).

- I will read and discuss a children's book that reflects the Middle East with the participant students (30-50 minutes) once a week for one month. This will be conducted in a group setting (during normal school day). Students will be asked to respect the privacy of other members in the group by not revealing anything they have learned about other members. As I read with the students, I will invite them to share their thoughts and connections to the book and life. During another day, the students will continue discussing the book that they read earlier in the week (20 minutes). They may share their favorite parts in the story and talk about the previous books that we read. The students will be invited to write or/draw their thoughts about the book and their lives (15 minutes). I will provide papers, pencils, and colored pencils. Then, we will talk about their artifacts (15 minutes). I will photo-copy the students' artifacts, students can keep the originals. Students can speak/write in Arabic and/or English. The students' discussions will be audio recorded, with permission.

- I will also conduct some interviews (2-3) with the participant students (30 minutes). The interviews will be open ended where participants can share their views about the books or anything relevant to the study. The interviews will be conducted in Arabic or/and English. They will be audio recorded, with permission.

**It is not anticipated students in the class will perceive anything out of the ordinary when participant students gather for the research. It is common for students to leave for additional programs at the school (such as ENL tutoring). This research will not interrupt the other programs and classroom instruction.

I will consult with the students' teachers to find a time when I am able to speak with the participant students for the research that will not interrupt normal educational activities. The research will be conducted at the school in a place identified by an administrator as private and quiet (e.g. the library). The students will be notified by their teachers of the interview place. Students will be offered options to speak in Arabic or/and in English.

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- I will conduct an open-ended interview with the teachers individually (30 minutes, within one school period) to know about their thoughts regarding the participant students' engagements as well as to explore their views of the incorporation of multicultural literature. The interview will be audio recorded, with permission.

How long will it take?

Page 2 of 4
Research at the University at Albany involving human participants is carried out under the oversight of the Institutional Review Board (IRB). This research has been reviewed and approved by the IRB. If you have any questions concerning your rights as a research subject or if you wish to report any concerns about the study, you may contact University at Albany Office of Pre-Award and Compliance Services at 1-866-857-5459 or hscconcerns@albany.edu.

I understand the information above regarding the research that will be conducted in my school.

I do / do not give my permission for you to observe and interview the participant students and to have their artifacts.

I do / do not give my permission to have the participant students audio-recorded during the interviews, and the group setting.

I do / do not give my permission for you to interview the participant teachers and observe their classrooms.

Principal name (printed) ___________________________________________________________________
Principal signature __________________________ Date ______________
Appendix D

Parent Consent

Institutional Review Board (IRB)
Parental Permission for Child’s Participation in Research

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<td>Study Principal Investigator Email address</td>
<td><a href="mailto:aaldaej@albany.edu">aaldaej@albany.edu</a></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This is a parental permission form for research participation. It contains important information about this study and what to expect if you permit your child to participate.

Your child’s participation is voluntary. Please consider the information carefully. Feel free to discuss the study with your friends and family and to ask questions before making your decision whether or not to permit your child to participate. If you permit your child to participate, you will be asked to sign this form and will receive a copy of the form.

Purpose. This study seeks to understand the impact of interactive read-alouds of children’s literature that reflects the Middle East on Arabic speaking students.

Procedures/Tasks. This study will require data collection in the forms of interviews, interactive read-alouds, artifacts (drawings or/and written responses), and observations. This study will be conducted in a group setting. The data will be collected over six months, (approximately, two or three days a week). Each visit will last 30-60 minutes.

In this study:
• the first 2 weeks, I will observe your child at school during break times and recess. I will observe your child’s classroom during any interactive reading to get a general sense of how they usually respond to literature. The observation will not take more than one hour. I will conduct an open-ended interview with your child to find about their interests and needs (e.g. favorite books, sports, animals, and food), and to establish a friendly relationship. The interview will last for 30 minutes (within one
school period). The interview will be audio recorded, with permission. I will consult with the students’ teachers to find a time when I can speak with participant children for the research that will not interrupt normal educational activities. The research will be conducted at the school in a place identified by an administrator as private and quiet (e.g. the library). The students will be notified by their teachers of the interview place. Students will be offered options to speak Arabic or/and English.

- I will observe your child’s classroom when the his/her teachers read aloud children’s literature about the Middle East -for 6-8 weeks. The observation will last approximately for 30 minutes.

- I will read and discuss a children’s book that reflects the Middle East with the participant students (30-50 minutes) once a week for one month. This will be conducted in a group setting (during normal school day). As I read with the students, I will invite them to share their thoughts and connections to the book and life. During another day, the students will continue discussing the book that they read earlier in the week (20 minutes). They may share their favorite part/s in the story and talk about the previous books that we read. The students will be invited to write or/and draw their thoughts about the book and their lives (15 minutes). I will provide papers, pencils, and colored pencils. Then, the students will talk about their artifacts (15 minutes). I will photo-copy the students’ artifacts, students can keep the originals. Students can speak/write in Arabic and/or English. The students’ discussions will be audio recorded, with permission.

- I will interview (2-3) your child (30 minutes). To know about his/her views about the books or anything relevant to the study. The interviews will be conducted in Arabic or/and English.

**Risks and Benefits.** The study examines Arabic speaking students’ experiences of interactive read-a-louds and should involve no risks, as the confidentiality of the interviewees will be carefully maintained. The students will have the opportunity to reflect on their life experiences and project their voices through a close collaboration and interaction. Participants usually find that they are empowered in the process, as their experiences are acknowledged and valued.

**Confidentiality.** Efforts will be made to keep your child’s study-related information confidential. However, there may be circumstances where this information must be released. For example, personal information regarding your child’s participation in this study may be disclosed if required by state law. Also, your child’s records may be reviewed by the following groups (as applicable to the research):

- Office for Human Research Protections or other federal, state, or international regulatory agencies;
- The University at Albany Institutional Review Board or Office for Pre-Award and Compliance Services

**Participant Rights.** If parents and students choose to participate in the study, they may discontinue participation at any time. By signing this form, families do not give up any personal legal rights their children may have as participants in this study. Students may choose to not participate in the study at any time even if their parents consent to their participation.
The Institutional Review Board, responsible for human participants research at the University at Albany, reviewed this research project and found it to be acceptable, according to applicable state and federal regulations and University policies designed to protect the rights and welfare of participants in research.

Contacts and Questions. For questions, concerns, or complaints about the study you may contact me or my advisor, Dr. Kelly Wiseman (kwiseman@albany.edu).

If you have any questions concerning yourself or your child’s rights as a research participant or if you wish to report any concerns about the study, you may contact University at Albany Office for Pre-Award and Compliance Services at 1-866-857-5459 or husconcerns@albany.edu.

Signing the parental permission form. I have read (or someone has read to me) this form and I am aware that I am being asked to provide permission for my child to participate in a research study. I have had the opportunity to ask questions and have had them answered to my satisfaction. I voluntarily agree to permit my child to participate in this study.

Printed name of participant (child)

Printed name of person authorized to provide permission for participant

Signature of person authorized to provide permission for participant

Relationship to the participant

Date

I do_/ do not _ give my permission to have my child participate in the study.

I do_/ do not _ give my permission to the researcher to observe my child.

I do_/ do not _ give my permission to have my child recorded.

I do_/ do not _ give my permission to collect my child’s writings/drawings.

Signature
**تصميم الوثائق لمشاركة الطفل في البحث**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>رقم الدراسة</th>
<th>وصف الدراسة</th>
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<tr>
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<td>تفاعل طالب مطلق لغة عربية مع فصص الأطفال التي تكسي الشرق الأوسط</td>
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</table>

**الدروز**

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<th>رقم الباحث</th>
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</table>

البريد الإلكتروني للباحث:

aladdej@albany.edu

هذا نموذج تصريح الوثائق للمشاركة في البحث. أن يكون معلومات حامة حول هذه الدراسة وماذا ينصح به مفاوضتك لما هو م交替.

مشاركة طفلك في مشروع البحث يعني أنك تعتمدين الخدمات الطبية والتعليمية. لا تتردد في الاتصال بالباحث للإجابة على أي أسئلة أو استفسارات. قبل البدء في التسجيل، يُنصح بمراجعة التفاصيل المذكورة في هذا النموذج واتخاذ قرار بالتسجيل.

**الغرض من الدراستة:**

- لمعرفة كيف تقرأ الأطفال الفصص التي تكسي الشرق الأوسط على طابع مكتبي لغة العربية.

**الإجراءات/المهام:**

- السماح للمشاركين بالقراءة في شكل مثير للإعجاب على طابع مكتبي لغة العربية.

**الملاحظات**

- الدراستة سوف تكون مفتوحة ومتعددة الاشخاص.

**إذا في السماح للمشاركين بالقراءة في شكل مثير للإعجاب على طابع مكتبي لغة العربية،**

**أولاً:** ملاحظة معلوماتهم واستلامهم على كل الأطفال الذين يتكسي الشرق الأوسط. قراءة طابع مكتبي لغة العربية، ثم استلامهم بقراءة الكتب.

**ثانياً:** قراءة الأطفال بمجرد قراءتهم في الكتاب. قراءة الكتب، ثم استلامهم بالقراءة. قراءة الكتب، ثم استلامهم بالقراءة.

**الشفافيات: الزائرون في الأسبوعية سوف يتفوقون كل يوم في التفاعل مع الأطفال الذين يقتلون الكتب وال:].**

الملاحظات والتفاصيل: هذه الدراستة لا تضمن أي التفاعل، كما يتيح الفرصة على السياق الآمن وسوف يكون هناك الفرصة للتفكير في تجربة النحتية. عادة ما بعد الشفافيات، قد يكون الأطفال يطورون في هذا العملية، كما يتم الإجراءات لتعزيزها ومتابعتها.
السياحة: سوف يتم الحفاظ على المعلومات ذات الصلة لدراسة السياحة بحرية، ولكن قد تكون هناك تصرفات حيث يجب الإبلاغ عن هذه المعلومات مسبقاً. سيسأل الكاتب عن المعلومات الشخصية المتعلقة بالمشاركة في هذه الدراسة إذا كانت الأمر من قبل القانون. يكون مكتب حماية البيئة الاستمالة أو مكتب مراجعة الأبحاث بجامعة القاهرة.

حقوق المشاركة: قد يُطلب منك المشاركة في هذه الدراسة.

إذا كتب أنك تغيرت الظروف الخاصة في المشاركة في أي وقت، قد تخطر طلبك بالمشاركة في الدراسة في أي وقت حتى لو كنت توافق على المشاركة.

هيئة مراجعة الأبحاث في جامعة أبديس هي مسؤول عن مراجعة هذا المشروع البشري وقبوله. وفقاً لأمانة الميثاق، تهدف إلى حماية حقوق المشاركات البشريات.

الاستمارات والتوقيعات: أي توافق أو استمرار في الدراسة، يمكنك الاتصال بالباحث أو بمشرفة الدراسة، كيلي ويسيم.

kswisman@albany.edu

إذا كنت تريد أن أستلم توثيق (ملحق وثيقة) أو إذا كنت تريد في الإبلاغ عن أي مخاوف حول الدراسة، يمكنك الاتصال بمكتب جامعة الباحث على 857-866-154599.

التوقيع على اتفاقية موانع الاحتكار: لقد قررت (أو أسمخ قد قررت في هذا الموضع) إذا أعاد تأكيد إذا كنت مشارك في الدراسة مباشرة. وقد أثبتت في النقطة الرسمية للحاجة، وكان لكم الإجابة. وأنا أوافق طولما أنني يتلقى المشاركة في هذه الدراسة.

الموافقة:_____________________

نورتي:_____________________

التوقيع:_____________________

الموافقة:_____________________

نورتي:_____________________

التوقيع:_____________________

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الموافقة:_____________________

نورتي:_____________________

التوقيع:_____________________

الموافقة:_____________________

نورتي:_____________________

التوقيع:_____________________
Appendix E

Child Assent

What I will say to the student:
I am a college student and I want to learn how Arabic speaking students, like you, learn about what you think when you see characters in books that look like you.

To do this I will:
- Visit your classroom during any reading time to learn about you and your teachers. I will also visit your reading classroom when your teacher reads with you books about your lives.
- Ask you questions about things you like.
- Read you books. You can write or/and draw about the book we read. You will be other students from your school and classroom who speak Arabic, and you will be reading, talking, and drawing with them. You can use Arabic and/or English when you speak or write.
- If you have any question about what we are doing you can talk to your teacher or parents and they can call me for you.

It is okay to say “No” if you don’t want to be in the study. You won’t get in trouble and no one will be mad. If you say “Yes” you can change your mind and stop at any time. Just tell me, your parent or your teacher.

** PI will only use participant students who say “yes”.
Appendix F

Alignment of Data Sources with Research Questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Questions</th>
<th>Data Sources</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. What is the nature of Arabic-speaking students’ engagement with children’s literature about the Middle East in the grade-level and ENL classrooms?</td>
<td>Interactive read-alouds (observational notes)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Field notes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Interview with students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Interview with teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. How do Arabic-speaking students respond when I read children’s literature about the Middle East in a culturally sustaining context?</td>
<td>Interactive read-alouds (audio-recorded)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Multimodal responses to literature</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Field notes</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Interview with students</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Interview with teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Interview with families</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix G

Interview Questions

Students Interview Protocol

Interview guide for initial Interview

1. Tell us about yourself?
2. How long you have been in the U.S?
3. Do you have brothers/sisters?
4. How do you spend your free time?
5. What kind of things you would like to do when you are not in school?
6. What kind of things you would like to read?
7. What’s your favorite book? Can you tell us about it?
8. What are your favorites—hobbies, memories or/and places? and tell us more about that?
9. Is there anything you would like to tell us?

Interview guide during phase 2 and 3

1. What do you feel when you read books about your life?
2. Tell me/us about your feelings when you share about your life/family/country?
3. How did reading these books make you think about yourself as a reader/writer?
4. How did you feel about the books when your teachers read them with the whole class?
5. How did you feel about the books when we were reading them in our small group?
6. Do you remember when we were reading that book… and talking about… what made you think of this…? What made you remember that person…? What made you feel that way…?

7. Do you remember when you wrote/draw about that book… what made you think of this…? What made you write about that person…?

8. Who is your favorite character/s in the stories that we read so far? And why?

9. Do you remember when you shared about… is there anything else you would like to add? I would like to know more about that…

Teacher Interview Protocol

Interview guide during phase 2 and 3

1. Tell me about the Arabic-speaking students’ literary engagement?

2. Tell me about the Arabic-speaking students as readers/writers/talkers?

3. What are your thoughts about using diverse children’s literature?

4. Do the Arabic-speaking students share about their background knowledge? What do they share? What type of issues they bring?

5. How you describe their identities when reading books that reflect their lives?

6. What are your thoughts about the Arabic-speaking students’ engagement when you read these books in your classroom?

7. When you were reading that book… how you describe their connections? Disconnections?

8. Is there anything you would like to tell me?
Family Interview Protocol

Interview guide during phase 3

1. Do you read with your child at home? What type of books?

2. Do you speak Arabic or/and English with your child at home?

3. What are your thoughts about your child using his/her first language (Arabic) in our small literature group?

4. What are your thoughts about your child’s engagement at school?

5. What are your thoughts about your child’s reading books about the Middle East?

6. What are your thoughts about your child’s engagement with these books?

7. What does your child share at home after we start reading these books with him/her?

8. What are your thoughts about your child’s cultural identities at school?

9. When reading that book…your child shares…what are your thoughts about that?

10. Do you share your cultural background in school? How you describe your involvement in your child’s school?

11. Is there anything you would like to tell me?
Appendix I

Digital Coding Example

Amal: what he is doing there?
Yam: he is trying to grab that star...this is my bob...he is helping my dad get the star...
This is my brother...My brother always play with his phone and he won’t let me play...I
don’t have a phone, my brother has one...he plays all different kind of games, he plays
Black wizards, Castle of Magic too.